

# VECTOR

127

The critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association

75p

**Vector** (*vektŏr*). 1704. (— *L.* *vector* carrier, traveller, rider, *f.* *vect* —, *pa. ppl.* stem of *vehere* carry; see —OR 2.) + 1. *Astr.* An imaginary straight line joining a planet moving round a centre, or the focus of an ellipse, to that centre or focus. Also *V.* radius = radius *v.* (RADIUS 3 d) — 1796. 2. *Math.* A quantity having direction as well as magnitude, denoted by a line drawn from its original to its final position 1865. 3. A carrier of disease 1926. Hence **Vecto** rial *a.* of, pertaining to, or connected with a *v.* or radius *vector*.

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EDITOR <b>David V. Barrett</b>	REVIEWS EDITOR <b>Paul Kincaid</b>	PRODUCTION EDITOR <b>Hussain R. Mohamed</b>	PRODUCTION ASSISTANT <b>Ann Morris</b>
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With this issue we welcome **Hussain R. Mohamed** as Production Editor, and **Ann Morris**, Production Assistant. By working closely together as an editorial team we hope to make *Vector* consistently better than ever before. Our thanks to **Alan Dorey** for stepping in to produce the last two issues.

**Mary Gentle's** first Albion Writ in *Vector* 126 has prompted a

number of letters; **Chris Priest's** contribution in this issue will, we hope, raise even more response. An earlier writer of psychological (as opposed to hard science) SF was **Theodore Sturgeon**, who died in May. My own contribution to *Vector's* tribute is simply this: if you haven't read him, do so; he was one of the greats.



# EDITORIAL

DAVID V BARRETT



Just a roll, just a roll,  
Just a roll on your drum.

Just a roll, just a roll,  
And the War has begun. - (1)

THIS IS THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF the Vietnam War, the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, and the 40th anniversary also of Hiroshima. These quotations come from a number of sources, none of them science-fictional. Much of SF does not deal with war - but of those books that do, take the first ten that come to mind, and consider their attitudes. As the 'literature of ideas', can we really say that SF is showing sufficient responsibility?

I like to believe that people in the long run are going to do more to promote peace than governments. Indeed, I think that people want peace so much that one of these days governments had better get out of their way and let them have it.

- Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1959 (2)

In 1983 there were 40 separate conflicts; 8 countries had troops fighting on foreign soil; a total of 4 million troops were fighting in 75 countries. Armed conflicts have taken up to 21 million lives since the Second World War. In conflicts where it is possible to make a meaningful distribution between casualties in and out of uniform, 3 out of every 5 fatalities were civilians.

- U.N. Report (3)

The average age of a combat soldier in the Second World War was 26.  
In Vietnam it was 19...

None of them received a hero's welcome.

- Paul Hardcastle

Now come on mothers throughout the land,  
Pack your boys off to Vietnam.  
Come on fathers don't hesitate,  
Send your boys off before it's too late.  
Be the first one on your block to have your boy come home in a box.

- song (4)

Suddenly a glaring whitish, pinkish light appeared in the sky accompanied by an unnatural tremor which was followed almost immediately by a wave of suffocating heat and a wind which swept away everything in its path. Within a few seconds the thousands of people in the streets in the centre of the town were scorched by a wave of searing heat. Many were killed instantly, others lay writhing on the ground screaming in agony from the intolerable pain of their burns. Everything standing upright in the way of the blast - walls, houses, factories and other buildings, was annihilated...Hiroshima had ceased to exist.

- contemporary Japanese journalist (5)

The current argument for the ultimate deterrent:

that has kept the peace. The threat to that peace would come if the balance was upset... The certainty that any nation which starts such a war will be committing suicide is the most powerful motive for preserving the peace.

- Daily Mirror 6/11/80

But the idea is not new:

We are quite sure that if any man could invent a means of destruction, by which two nations going to war with each other would see large armies destroyed, and immense

treasure wasted on both sides, in a single campaign, they would both hesitate at entering upon another. In this sense the greatest destroyer is the greatest philanthropist.

- A History of Wonderful Inventions, 1862 (6)

If any question why we died,  
Tell them, because our fathers lied.

- Rudyard Kipling

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,

And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gurgling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, -

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest

When I grow up  
I want to be  
ALIVE..



To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old lie: Dulce et decorum est  
Pro patria mori.

- Wilfred Owen

In 1943 I became Supreme Allied Commander in SE Asia, and saw death and destruction on an even greater scale. But that was all conventional warfare and, horrible as it was, we all felt we had a 'fighting' chance of survival. In the event of a nuclear war there will be no chances, there will be no survivors...

- Mountbatten (5)

Both East and West have the ability to devastate each other whatever the arguments may be regarding the total number of warheads. Effective parity therefore exists already; once a human being is killed once, the ability to kill him twenty times over becomes irrelevant. - (2)

Why quicken the pace?

Why does it seem that you choose to lose reason before losing face?

Russians and Americans driven by the past  
The Third World moves in the shadows you cast

Russians and Americans could turn the world to dust.

- Al Stewart

In 1967 it was estimated that 10 million people suffered from smallpox, of whom 2 million died. It took twelve years of international co-operation before the World Health Organisation could declare that in 1980 smallpox had been eradicated. This achievement cost 300 million dollars, the equivalent of the cost of 2.5 days of the nuclear arms race. - (2)

Now come on Wall Street don't be slow, Why man this is war so go go go

There's plenty good money to be made,  
Supplying the Army with the tools of the trade

Just hope and pray that if they drop the Bomb, They drop it on the Vietcong. - (4)

These highly accurate weapon systems seem to be ideal for fighting a nuclear war but useless for deterring one...in times of crisis there would inevitably be great pressures on both sides to fire their systems first - for to wait could result in one's own missiles being destroyed. This inevitably leads to the conclusion that the deployment of the Pershing and Cruise missiles will reduce European security by making nuclear war more, and not less likely. - (2)

I repeat in all sincerity as a military man that I can see no use for any nuclear weapons which would not end in escalation, with consequences that no-one can conceive.. How can we stand by and do nothing to prevent the destruction of our world?

- Mountbatten (5)

'Star Wars'

The prospects for developing an effective, total defense against Soviet ballistic missiles are very poor. All of the proposed space weapons systems now under investigation face enormous technical hurdles and are highly vulnerable to devastating Soviet countermeasures. A move by the United States to implement a ballistic missile defence would be highly provocative and could precipitate an unconstrained Soviet response.

- Union of Concerned Scientists (7)

And it's One Two Three, What're we fighting for?

Don't ask me I don't give a damn, Next stop is Vietnam

And it's Five Six Seven, Open up the Pearly Gates

Well there ain't no time to wonder why, Whoopee we're all gonna die. - (4)

In 1952 Charlie Chaplin was expelled from the USA after being investigated by the Commission on UnAmerican Activities. But Chaplin was not anti-American or pro-Russian: 'Jew, Gentile - black men, white..we are all the same.' Who, then, is the enemy? 'The enemy chooses to dress in a different uniform, so you'll be able to recognise him and kill him.' Russia is now the enemy; in the last war she was our friend. 'It seems to me that where



# Dangerous divisions



## READERS LETTERS

2 A FEW COMMENTS ON ELIZABETH SOUBET'S ARTICLE IN VECTOR 126: I wonder if she is right in her opinion that faith in science, itself, has vanished. I wonder if pessimistic and gloom-laden SF stories are a result of a loss of faith and increasing mistrust in the politics of science and the developments in technology which stem from this. Such a gloomy future vision does not necessarily reflect the writer's own outlook on the future, but may reflect the writer's concerns on the possibility how easily things can go sour. Science can still find cures for diseases, but it's the political pressure applied that leads to the production of weapons of any sort, whether the weapons are soft-weapons designed to brainwash us, or hard ones designed to destroy us. Influences in this and other areas, political and otherwise has led to a great many of the unsavoury aspects of our society, not scientific developments in themselves, and often, not even technological ones, in themselves. Unethical practices or uses of our sciences and technology are chiefly to blame, and the manipulation that goes with them. I don't believe there is a loss of faith in science, but there is certainly a quite justifiable loss of faith in the way it and technology is wrongly exploited.

Science fiction's present pessimism is in sympathy with our present, gloomy and real predicament. There are also other worrying factors, with some writers of scenes of extreme violence and sexual degradation as culprits, but the majority write responsibly, if not competently. In any case, the present situation may offer writers and readers alike a release from reality into a world, that by comparison, is a lot worse. Facing reality after that doesn't seem so bad. And at its best, SF is a cautionary as well as entertaining media. Such caution stems from knowing ourselves too well. We still commit atrocities, we still make irresponsible acts and decisions. None of us really wants a utopia - we are too fascinated with our darker sides. We watch and read about death with our tongues hanging out, our eyes betraying the way we lap it up. It's called adventure. This is symptomatic of our times. In a bureaucracy, with no outlets for a true and whole release of our emotions, no room large enough in which to become truly individual, feeling cramped, stymied and stifled, we hunger after anything that offers an artificial version. The frustration of not being able to smell a flower because it is plastic goes much deeper than we admit to ourselves, and this is the case with so many aspects of our 'modern' life. Our frustrated and suppressed feelings and desires are at the root of so many of our difficulties, and when times get better, when writers are more in touch with their hearts, then we can look forward to that heart-warming optimism we, paradoxically, seek.

Mary Gentle's article was very illuminating. When I found

out the Narnia books were religious in content, I was put off reading them - this was some four or five years ago. I still can't get myself to buy the books. It isn't any picture of stained-glass either, but a dislike of the Christian doctrine. Mary Gentle's comments have convinced me the books aren't as religious as they have seemed - as far as Christianity goes anyway, but the stigma is there and I can't shake it off. It's funny, in that religion fascinates me. Religious fanaticism, though, does not.

You may like to apply my way of viewing things to Haldeman's comments on the American spirit, in his last paragraph of part one of the interview, and so it should come as no surprise the Americans were in favour of the invasion. How much of that favour was in support of their belief they were doing the right thing, or because it offered a distraction from the stigma of life. The same question can be applied to any war, any army, any nation. That Haldeman could see through the drawing-room words 'American spirit' is commendable, but it's a shame he still harboured a contradictory faith. Saying that, I admire his perception and will start hunting for his books.

TERRY BROOME

45 Hykeham Road  
Lincoln  
LN6 8AA

I THOUGHT VECTOR 126 WAS A GOOD ISSUE, WITH A NICE BALANCE OF material. It is a pity, though, that Mary Gentle couldn't extend her scholarship from the various works on Lewis to the Bible. "I may be wrong, but I think the resurrection got tacked onto the Jesus legend fairly late in the day..." Yes, Mary is wrong, as a glance at Matthew Chapter 16 Verse 21 would show - "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again on the third day." Or Mark Chapter 8 Verse 31 - "And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." Or Luke Chapter 9 Verses 22 and 23 - "And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing: Saying, The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day." The similarity of the wording - in stories which far more often than not describe the same events very differently, if at all, is remarkable and typical of those occasions when the Gospel writers - at different times and spread throughout the Mediterranean - were retelling the actual words of Christ. No, the resurrection

## EDITORIAL/Continued

friendship means so little, governments should not be playing with bombs and rockets, as though they were children's toys. Because you and I, we stand in the middle. We are the comedians'.

- Joseph Ley (8)

Four out of every hundred Servicemen who man nuclear weapons control rooms in America suffer from alcoholism, drug abuse or mental illness... In 1979, 1300 nuclear servicemen were discharged from their jobs because of drugs abuse - including 250 taking heroin and LSD - and a further 1300 because of mental disturbance. Dr. James Thompson, senior lecturer in psychiatry at Middlesex Hospital medical school and a member of MCANW said: 'A sane and well-balanced person can make mistakes in stressful situations, and the possibility of error with the most disastrous consequences is multiplied if servicemen with severe personality disorders have their finger on the button'.

- Daily Telegraph, 20/1/1983

'...and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. Then from the smoke came locusts

on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions. And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death will fly from them.

- Revelation 9: 2-6

The explosion of a single nuclear bomb of the size used at Hiroshima over a major city in the UK is likely to produce so many cases of trauma and burns requiring hospital treatment that the remaining medical services in the UK would be completely overwhelmed.

- BMA Report (9)

Einstein was asked to prophesy what weapons could be used in the Third World War. I am told he replied to the following effect: 'On the assumption that a Third World War must escalate to nuclear destruction, I can tell you what the Fourth World War will be fought with - bows and arrows.'

- Mountbatten (5)

The stone age may return on the gleaming wings of science, and what might now shower immeasurable blessings upon mankind may even bring about its total destruction.

Beware, I say; time may be short.

- Churchill (10)

### SOURCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. Fairport Convention - 'Sloth;
2. Dr C. Phillips & Dr. I. Ross - *The Nuclear Casebook* - Polygon 1983
3. The Guardian 16/2/85
4. Country Joe MacDonald - 'I Feel I'm Fixing to Die Rag'
5. Earl Mountbatten of Burma - 'On Nuclear Arms and War' (Speech at Strasbourg 11/5/1979)
6. Chris Morgan - *The Shape of Futures Past* - Webb & Bower 1980
7. Union of Concerned Scientists, Cambridge, Mass. - *Breaking Point*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Spring 1984
8. Joseph Ley, Director Harrogate Theatre in Education - *Charlie Chaplin: The Great Dictator*
9. British Medical Association - *The Medical Effects of Nuclear War*
10. Norman Myers, ed. - *The Gaia Atlas of Planet Management* - Pan 1985

is not a late addition to the myth, but one of the earliest and most definite elements of Christianity (without it there is no Christianity, as Mary so rightly remarks in her dismissal of Aslan as the risen Christ). Still, it is a very powerful piece of work and reflects many of the disquieting moments I had when, as a strongly convinced Christian, I adapted 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' for the stage, once upon a time. There is a lot in Lewis's face value churchiness which does not bear much examination.

MARYN TAYLOR

Flat 2  
17 Hutchinson Square  
Douglas  
Isle of Man

MARY GENTLE'S AUTHORITATIVE RAMBLE AROUND NARNIA (VECTOR 126) embodies a stimulating assessment of C.S. Lewis's purposes and achievements in those books - stimulating because she is constantly prompting her readers to question further, and in doing so to refer back to the texts. In doing just this I found one or two points on which, while being in agreement with the trend of her argument, I would like either to voice reservations or offer further comment.

First, the question of Aslan's martyrdom to save Edmund. It isn't, as she (following Walter Hooper) suggests, simply a case of sacrifice for a single boy - although even that, on the "lost sheep" principle might be thought a valid Christian paradigm - but a sacrifice made in order that a prophecy should be fulfilled viz. that Narnia would only be rescued from the frosty power of the White Witch when four humans came to occupy the four thrones at Cair Paravel; and, as Lancelyn Green points out in his Bodley Head Monograph, the Witch proposes to sacrifice Edmund's life so that the fourth throne can never be filled. There is, in fact, a strong eschatological strain running through the Narnian Chronicles and I suspect there is a loose but real mythopoetic correspondence between the fulfilment of that prophecy and the four angels of Revelation (7.1) and those that sat upon the thrones - Revelation (20.4) - to reign for a thousand years, while the Devil is bound and cast into the abyss (after which "he must be loosed for a little time"). Variations on this motif not only recur in the Narnia books but also form a main strand in the Perelandrian trilogy.

This brings me to my second reservation, which arises out of Mary Gentle's contention that Lewis "just plain side-steps" the issue of the entry of evil into Narnia. The key text here is The Magician's Nephew, much of which is taken up with the creation of Narnia by Aslan. Aslan, like Maleldil in the SF novels, is fictionally surrogate for both God and Son of God, and Mary Gentle needn't really have worried about the apparent dichotomy, or about the orthodoxy of such dual identity. Narnia, as Aslan creates it, is an Eden - as is the planet Venus in Perelandra; evil comes into it as a result of Digory's violence and wilfulness in ringing the golden bell in Charn, thus awaking and bringing to Narnia the evil Queen/Witch. This event, and the earth-life from which Digory comes, are outside Narnian created time, reflecting Lewis's belief that the original "Fall" was something taking place on a supernatural plane and involving the revolt of a will-endowed created entity against its creator, and that men, also created with free wills, joined in the revolt. He seems to think their revolt a contingent circumstance, for in Perelandra Adam and Eve remain in their paradise avoiding a "Fall", and in a straight popular theological work (Beyond Personality) Lewis wrote: "I don't know how things would have worked out if the human race had not rebelled against God and joined the enemy." One may be disinclined to accept Lewis's supernatural premise but, if you all him that, he is neither illogical nor side-stepping.

One further reservation: I can't quite agree that The Last Battle is not a "proper" Narnian book. I do agree that perhaps the Celtic/Norse/Classical foundations may be more apparent in some of the earlier books, but the platonic and eschatological veins that emerge so strongly in The Last Battle are also never absent from its predecessors. They are there, for example, in the transformations of life and landscape at the end of The Silver Chair; in the mode of creation of Narnia through the music of Aslan's song in The Magician's Nephew; in the transpositions by which the apple-seed brought by Digby from the paradisaal garden becomes (in The Lion) the Wardrobe of passage between Earth and Narnia; and most patently in Aslan's valediction in Dawn Treader: "There is a way into my country from all the worlds...the very reason why you were brought to Narnia (was) that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there". Although Lewis denied any initial planning of his stories as Christian allegories, saying, I'm sure with accurate recall, that they all started with pictures in the mind, he also said (in Of Other Worlds) that he chose the genre that he called "Fairy Tale" because it "seemed the ideal form for the stuff I had to say"; and certainly that "stuff" is continuous thought the Chronicles

of which The Last Battle is the natural culmination.

Finally, not a reservation, but an observation. In the autobiographical Surprised by Joy, Lewis wrote that with his mother's death (he was nine at the time) "all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable, disappeared from my life...it was sea and islands now: the great continent had sunk like Atlantis." It is remarkable how regularly, both in the Narnia books and his SF/fantasy novels this image occurs: in the floating paradisaal islands of Perelandra; in the perilously hnakra haunted seas and in the islanded "heaven" of Meldilorn in Out of the Silent Planet; in the saving return of Atlantean magia in the person of Merlin in That Hideous Strength. Obvious parallels and resonances occur throughout the Narnian Chronicles: "the great flat plain which was cut into countless little islands by countless channels of water" of The Silver Chair; in Dawn Treader where: "In the sea, the deeper you go, the darker and colder it gets, and it is down there, in the dark and cold, that dangerous things live...It is on the heights (or as we would say 'in the shallows') that there is warmth and peace..."; in Prince Caspian, where the archetypal island of entry is a launching pad for the redeeming of Narnia; and above all in The Last Battle when the sea comes in until "all was level water from where they stood to where the water met the sky", and where, as they made their way ever "farther up" to the "real Narnia", Tirian wept for the passing of the Narnia he had know, saying: "I have seen my mother's death." In leaving an apocalyptic landscape, reminiscent both of Revelation and of the furthest reaches of The Time Machine, they have passed through the ice-encrusted Doorway to "find themselves in warm daylight, the blue sky above them, flowers at their feet, and laughter in Aslan's eyes." (This is not unlike Wells's Traveller's experience when, escaping the dying earth and sun in his machine, he immediately found that "the sun got golden again, the sky blue".)

In a recent TLS review (21.6) of Humphrey Carpenter's Secret Gardens, a book which surveys the work not only of nineteenth century children's writers and fantasists, but also that of Tolkien and Lewis, Isabel Quigly asks: "...was the whole flight into the walled garden of perfect fantasy (or fantastic perfection) an escape from unfaceable reality?". I doubt whether this judgement should be applied to Lewis in any sweepingly dismissive sense - his formidable intellect was constantly on guard. Nevertheless, it can fairly be said that, in common with many other writers of works containing elements of such fantasy who also experienced some marked childhood deprivation (the Dickens of 'The Child's Dream of a Star' and The Old Curiosity Shop; the Kipling of 'The Wish House' and Puck of Pook's Hill; the Wells of the eloi "paradise" and The Happy Turning), Lewis suffered trauma with lasting effect. His mother's death, soon followed by a "Belsen" life at Wynyard School, helped to create a condition of alienation in which he says: "I feared for my soul." He also says (in Surprised by Joy) that critics who want a historical explanation of what they consider a too great preponderance of Hell in his books should seek it in the Anglo-Catholicism of the church at "Belsen". Out of such tensions grew later intimations of more ultimate roots of disharmony - historical, metaphysical, cosmic; but also images of unity and restoration, together with knowledge of possible and positive paths towards the achievement of what they symbolised.

Lewis, of course, was himself well aware of correspondences and what he called "transpositions" between different states of experience and being. In a layman's sermon delivered in Oxford (at Mansfield College) he said: "In varying degrees the lower reality can actually be drawn into the higher and become part of it." That expresses the essentials of Narnia. He certainly regarded "pagan" elements and their origins in this light; and Mary Gentle's article is of great value in opening up thought about the validity of such a concept.

K.V. BAILEY

1 Val de Mar  
Alderney  
C.I.





# STURGEON

—remembered

1

Reprinted from the newsletter of the Birmingham SF Group, with the author's permission.

STURGEON? THE NAME WAS MAGNETIC. THERE IT WAS, PERPETUALLY cropping up attached to the stories I most admired. Sturgeon: 'quite an ordinary Anglo-American word among exotics like A.E. Van Vogt, Isaac Asimov, Heinlein, Simak, and Kuttner. Yet - spikey, finny, odd. And it was not his original name. Theodore Hamilton Sturgeon was born Edward Hamilton Waldo. To the usual boring, undeserving parents. That was on Staten Island, the year the First World War ended.

So there were two of him, as there are of many a good writer. A bright side, a dark side - much like our old SF image of Mercury, remember, so much more interesting than banal reality. He had a mercurial temperament.

The bright side was the side everybody loved. There was something so damned nice, charming, open, empathic, and elusive about Ted that women flocked to him. Men too. Maybe he was at the mercy of his own fey sexuality. If so, he was quizzical about it, as about everything. One of his more cutesy titles put it admirably: *If All Men were Brothers, Would You Let One Marry Your Sister?* Not if it was Sturgeon, said a too-witty friend.

He played his guitar. He sang. He shone. He spoke of his philosophy of love.

Ted honestly brought people happiness. If he was funny, it was a genuine humour which sprang from seeing the world aslant. A true SF talent. Everyone recognised his strange quality - "faunlike", some nut dubbed it; faunlike he certainly looked. Inexplicable, really.

Unsympathetic stepfather, unsatisfactory adolescence. Funny jobs, and *Ether Breather* out in Astounding in 1939. So to an even funnier job, science fiction writer. It's flirting with disaster.

I could not believe those early stories: curious subject matter, bizarre resolutions, glowing style. And about sexuality. You could hardly believe your luck when one of Ted's stories went singing through your head.

It, with Galtier illustrations, in *Unknown*. Terrifying. *Derm Fool*. Madness. The magnificent *Microcosmic God*, read and re-read. *Killdozer*, appearing after a long silence. There were to be other silences. *Baby is Three*: again in the sense of utter incredibility with complete conviction, zinging across a reader's synapses. By a miracle, the blown-up version, *More Than Human*, was no disappointment either. This was Sturgeon's caviar dish. Better even than *Venus Plus X* with its outre sexuality in a hermaphrodite utopia.

As for those silences. Something sank Sturgeon. His amazing early success, his popularity with fans and stardom at conventions - they told against the writer. Success is a vampire. In the midst of life we are in definite trouble. They say Sturgeon was the first author in the field ever to sign a six-book contract. A six-book contract was a rare mark of distinction, like being crucified. A mark of extinction. Ted was no stakhanovite and the deal did for him; he was reduced to writing a novelization of a schlock TV series, *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, to fulfil his norms.

At one time, he was reduced further to writing TV pilot scripts for Hollywood. He lived in motels or trailers, between marriages, between lives. Those who read *The Dreaming Jewels* or *Venus Plus X* or the story collections forget that writing is secretly a heavy load, an endless battle against the disappointments which come from within as well as without - and reputation a heavier load. Ted was fighting his way back to the light when night came on.

About Ted's dark side.

Well, he wrote that memorable novel, *Some of Your Blood*, about this crazy psychotic who goes for drinking menstrual discharge. Actually, it does not taste as bad as Ted made out. That was his bid to escape the inescapable adulation.

One small human thing he did. He and I, with James Gunn, were conducting the writers' workshop at the Conference of the Fantastic at Boca Raton, Florida. This was perhaps three years ago.

Our would-be writers circulated their effusions around the table for everyone's comment. One would-be was a plump, pallid, unhappy lady. Her story was a fantasy about a guy who tried three times to commit suicide, only to be blocked each time by a green monster from Hell who wanted him to keep on suffering. Sounds promising, but the treatment was hopeless.

Dumb comments around the table. I grew impatient with their unreality. When the story reached me, I asked the lady right out,



THEODORE STURGEON —♦— 1918 - 1985

"Have you ever tried to commit suicide?"

Unexpected response. She stared at me in shock. Then she burst into a hailstorm of tears, collapsing onto the table. "Three times", she cried. Everyone looked fit to faint.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of", I said. "I've tried it too".

"So have I", said Sturgeon calmly.

He needn't have come in like that. He just did it bravely, unostentatiously, to support me, to support her, to support everyone. And I would guess there was a lot of misery and disappointment in Ted's life, for all the affection he generated. Yet he remained kind, loving, giving. (The lady is improving by the way. We're still in touch. That's another story.)

If that does not strike you as a positive story, I'm sorry. I'm not knocking suicide, either. Everyone should try it at least once.

Ted was a real guy, not an idol, an effigy, as some try to paint him. He was brilliant, so he suffered. I know beyond doubt that he would be pleased to see me set down some of the bad times he had. He was not one to edit things out. Otherwise he would have been a less powerful writer.

There are troves of lovely Sturgeon tales (as in the collection labelled *E Pluribus Unicorn*), like *Bianca's Hands*, which a new generation would delight in. He wrote well, if sometimes over-lushly. In many ways, Ted was the direct opposite of the big technophile names of his generation, like Doc Smith, Poul Anderson, Robert Heinlein, et al. His gaze was more closely fixed on people. For that we honoured him, and still honour him. Good for him that he never ended up in that prick's junkyard where they pay you a million dollars advance for some crud that no sane man wants to read.

Ted died early in May in Oregon, of pneumonia and other complications. Now he consorts with Sophocles, Dick, and the author of the *Kama Sutra*. He had returned from a holiday in Hawaii, taken in the hopes he might recover his health there. That holiday, incidentally, was paid for by another SF writer - one who often gets publicity for the wrong things. Thank God, there are still some good guys left. We are also duly grateful for the one just departed.

BRIAN ALDISS

## STURGEON

## REMEMBERED

2

Condensed with permission from the entry by John Clute in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, ed. Peter Nicholls, Granada 1979.

THEODORE STURGEON WAS BORN EDWARD HAMILTON WALDO IN NEW YORK City; Sturgeon was his stepfather's name. His career as an SF writer began in 1939, with the publication of *Ether Breather* in *Astounding*. In about three years of active writing he produced more than 25 stories, all in *Astounding* and *Unknown*, including *It* (1940) and *Microcosmic God* (1941).

Along with Van Vogt, Heinlein and Asimov, Sturgeon was a central contributor to and shaper of John W. Campbell's so-called Golden Age of SF, though perhaps less comfortably than his colleagues, as even in these early years he was less interested in technological or hard SF than in attempting to use SF frameworks to illuminate psychological tales, often romantic.

The decade following the Second World War saw Sturgeon at his most prolific and assured. He was increasingly free to write stories expressive of his interest in various manifestations of love, and though his explorations of sexual diversity seem unexceptionable nowadays, stories like *The World Well Lost* (1953), about aliens exiled from their own culture because they are homosexuals, created considerable stir on publication.

Sturgeon's most famous single volume is *More Than Human* (fix-up 1953), winner of the 1954 International Fantasy Award, which consists of three connected stories, two new sections built around *Baby is Three* (Galaxy, 1953) which is perhaps his most famous single story; it depicts with considerable intensity the coming together of six 'freaks' into a psi-powered Gestalt, and of its eventual achieving of true maturity.

A later tale, *Claustrophile* (1956) illustrates Sturgeon's adroitness with themes of frustrated adolescence. The young protagonist, cramped by his repressive family, is a sensitive oddball (like many young SF readers), and discovers himself to be not an Earthling at all but a lost member of a spacefaring race;



at the climax he discovers that his fear of falling is something else entirely: he is instinctively afraid that the earth is falling on him.

Theodore Sturgeon's technical exuberance and emotional warmth of texture often fitted ill into the traditional SF moulds he was so frequently forced to utilize. Though the lack of opportunity to write adult stories of love from the beginning of his career engendered some very unfortunate sentimentality in his work, he was a powerful and generally liberating influence in post-war American SF. He was particularly influential upon such younger writers of the 1960s as Samuel R. Delany. His voice as a writer was sometimes self-indulgent, and his technical experiments less substantial than they seemed to claim by the exuberance of their presentation, but his very faults demonstrate how great a struggle it has been in American SF to treat openly (and relaxedly) the profound themes to which he always addressed himself.

JOHN CLUTE

3

I THINK THAT EVERYTHING HAS BEEN SAID BY NOW. IF YOU READ LOCUS, or are a member of the SFWA, you will have read all about Ted.

There is little that I can add - other than my feeling of personal loss. Ted was a good and close friend for over forty years. We had a lot of fun together, got very drunk from time to time, and I shall miss him. He was a man of peace and the last time he stayed with us his calmness prevented my wife from throwing another guest off our balcony. Even though she was perfectly justified. But our friendship was ours and that is that. I just wish I could have seen more of him these last years. That is my personal loss. His loss is much greater so that chapter is closed.

The loss that we must all feel in SF is the death of a giant in our field. For Ted was one of the tiny band of first generation magazine writers who shaped science fiction as we know it today. Led by Campbell, he - and Van Vogt, Heinlein, Doc Smith, you know all the names as well as I do - took those

garish, crappy pulp magazines and created a new form of literature. That can never be taken away from them. Ted had a writing block as big as Mount Everest, Van's current writing seems to bear no relation to the old, Heinlein self-indulgently ignores his readers. It doesn't matter. What they did can never be diminished. I read them as they were being published - and it was a glorious time to be an SF fan.

This is the reason we readers miss him. He was one of the first - and one of the best. There will never be another like him because the universe is only created once.

So - goodbye Ted. It was a pleasure to know you.

And it was an unforgettable, mind-blowing, career-shaping, highly emotional experience to read what you wrote.

Thank you very, very much.

HARRY HARRISON

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# VIETNAM VETERAN — UNIVERSAL SOLDIER

He's 5 foot 2 and he's 6 foot 4  
He fights with missiles and with spears  
He's all of 31 and he's only 17  
Been a soldier for a thousand years  
— Buffy Saint Marie

Joe Haldeman interviewed at the 1984 Eurocon/Eastercon, Brighton, by Ken Lake with Geoff Rippington. (Part one appeared in Vector 126, June/July 1985)

**LAKE:** Just before we started our interview, you spotted the cover on *Infinite Dreams*, and you had one or two things to say about it. Would you like to say something about the concept of cover design?

**HALDEMAN:** That's a sore point with me right now. I just saw my latest cover for *Worlds Apart* in America, and it's awful. It's a woman with huge breasts, really exaggerated — she would be tipping over all the time! — and she's standing, looking intrepid, she has a face like Brooke Shields, she has a raygun in her hand, obviously in a space ship of some sort or a space station, with this huge space structure in the background, which isn't bad, it is actually in the book — but oh, such a pulpy cover! Now I could understand if this was a book that they had bought for peanuts, but it's probably one of the most expensive books they've bought this year, and they give it a cheap junk cover like that.

**LAKE:** Is it possibly because they figure that is how to treat an expensive book, to sell more? It doesn't matter what people buy it for — if it's got boobs it will sell?

**HALDEMAN:** Well, that's what my editor said when I called her. She's a woman for Christ sakes! 'How can you perpetrate something like this?' and she said, 'Well, I didn't like it either, but believe me, it'll sell books.' I guess I'll believe it when the royalties come in. The book is, to my mind, a dignified book, and that's a very undignified cover.

**LAKE:** So you have absolutely no control over this at all, no way you can stop it?

**HALDEMAN:** No. In fact, by the time I saw the cover it had been printed on a poster, and it had gone all over the place. No, some authors get control over covers, but the thing is, you have to trade off. If I absolutely required control of the covers I'd pay for it in terms of the advance money, because they're doing me a favour. And in fact they have a whole room full of people whose job it is to come up with good cover art, and they're experts, supposedly, so normally I let them.

**LAKE:** What about the content of *Infinite Dreams*? You made the

selection; have all the stories appeared previously?

**HALDEMAN:** Yes, in some form they have. Of course, one reason why you want to get magazine stories out in book form is so that you can correct all the terrible things that magazine editors did to your stories, like changing titles. There are no connecting links between the stories; the introductions talk about the circumstances under which each story was written and where the idea might have come from; other than that, they are just the first couple of dozen magazine stories I had out that I liked. I did not include any stories that I no longer cared for. It's still one of my favourite books; I like the variety. It's the book that I hand people who aren't science fiction readers because there is a lot of different stuff in it, and none of it's so long that it would put you to sleep. I left one story out; that is in my next collection, which will be called *Strange Seasons*. I think I may have just overlooked it, but it's 25 or 26 thousand words long, a very huge story. It was part of *The Forever War*, and maybe I didn't include it because it was too soon after *The Forever War* had come out. It was the middle section of the novel — "You can never go back" — it was going to be the middle section, but I sent it to Ben Goldberg at *Analog*, and he sent it back saying, 'It's too depressing, in the first place, and in the second place, most of it takes place on Earth, and your story is really out in space, you're just slowing things down.' I agreed with him, and reluctantly wrote another novelette, and that other novelette wound up in the book. Now I'm rather sorry it did; I think that the original should have stayed, so this is a way of getting straight.

**LAKE:** Would you consider rewriting part of *The Forever War* to make it the novel that you wish it were, or having a new edition published which was a variorum edition offering both the middles?

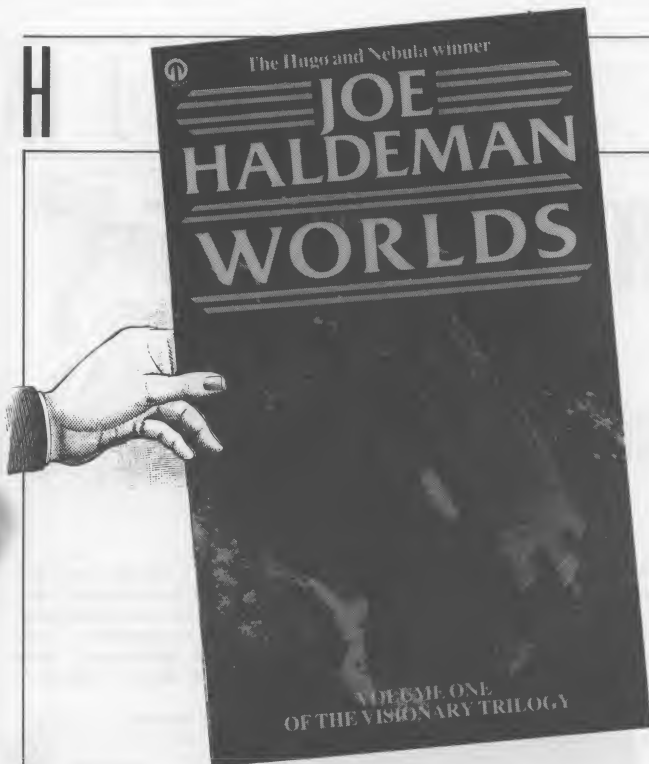
**HALDEMAN:** Now wouldn't that be interesting. If I could find a small press that would be interested in doing that I'd certainly like to do it. I don't know whether the book is too specifically 1970s, too much about Vietnam, to have sufficient interest in a variorum edition. But it is a Hugo winner, so possibly...

**RIPPINGTON:** You say the book is about Vietnam, for American



*Interview*  
PART TWO





readers, but to us, without you actually saying it, we wouldn't have thought about it in those terms.

**HALDEMAN:** Well, yes, but wars are wars, and I take the structure of Vietnam as the structure of a typical war, though of course it isn't

**LAKE:** But we don't see these parallels, that you and maybe many American readers see automatically in reading your books; they don't exist for us. That brings us, still on the subject of war, to your anthology *Study War No More*, in which you have writings by nine other writers plus yourself.

**HALDEMAN:** Let me tell you how I put that together, I never advertised for stories. I took writers whose work I admired, and who it seemed to me were pretty much on my side of the fence, that is, fairly Left, most of them; I wrote to them individually and asked, 'Have you ever written, or would you like to write an anti-war story?' And it turned out that all of them had one in the closet somewhere and they sent them along. It's an uneven collection, I suppose; I liked all the stories - there were some I liked more than others.

**LAKE:** It's uneven for one reason, in that Damon Knight's piece dates from 1954 and Poul Anderson's from 1959 - surely this has to enter into it, that they're written from a different viewpoint, so obviously they don't present a united picture of war, or a united picture of science fiction, for that matter. What therefore do you feel is the function of the book, and do those stories adequately, in retrospect, do what you wanted them to do?

**HALDEMAN:** Even from the immediate retrospect of writing the Introduction to it I had to admit that it did not fulfil what I had hoped it would. I wanted science fiction alternatives to war, and most of the stories instead treated war metaphorically, or the solutions were not practical solutions, they were things that pointed out one aspect or another of warlike behaviour, and also in retrospect, I shouldn't have been surprised at that, because if anybody ever has come up with a simple solution to war, one that can be put in a short story, nobody's ever heard of it!

**RIPPINGTON:** Do you enjoy editing as much as writing?

**HALDEMAN:** No, not as much. There's an awful lot of red tape involved, and you have condemned yourself to a lifetime of book-keeping as soon as you've done one of these things: every time a little royalty cheque comes in you have to split it ten ways. That's not part of an agent's job, normally, partly because the money's not that great. I have two anthologies; the other one is called *Cosmic Laughter* - that was my second book. That still brings in a little money every now and then, which I send out in little five dollar packets to various people. I think there was never a British edition of that per se; however, a box of them got over here for remainders, and I see it more often in Britain than I do in America, at signing sessions and that sort of thing. It's a competent little collection of fun science fiction stories. The contract was offered to me as an apology by my publisher for screwing up so badly on my first novel. He said, 'Here, you can have \$5000; put this together.' You

see, my first novel, *War Year*, was critically quite well received; I had the largest and most positive review I've ever had in the New York Times, which is of course the touchstone of commercial criticism in America, with that book. But they didn't print enough copies, and they didn't send them to the book stores. It was a book that was fated not to be sold. Probably one of the most appalling things that can ever happen to a first author: two weeks after the book came out I went to the American Booksellers Association meeting in Washington DC. I didn't have enough money for a ticket, but an editor loaned me his name tag, and I went in, and I went straight to my publisher's display, and they must have had 150 titles there, and they didn't have mine. So I asked the salesman, 'Do you know of a book called *War Year* by Joe Haldeman?' and he says, 'By George, you know, I read that one myself, and it's a really good book but it's about Vietnam, and nobody's going to buy it, so I didn't bother to bring it along.' It devastated me, and it cost him his job too, when I got the word back.

**LAKE:** Now, we've talked about the genesis of *Study War No More*, and the selection. What was the reaction of the contributors themselves to their contiguity to each other, once they came to read the completed book?

**HALDEMAN:** I got very little reaction from them, which is normally the case with anthologies. When I've been in anthologies I rapidly read through my story to make sure they didn't set the type upside down, and then I set it aside, and it may be years before I read the other stories in it.

**LAKE:** Oh, you don't see it as a connected concept at all, saying 'It's a pity you didn't put me in front of so-and-so and after so-and-so'?

**HALDEMAN:** No, there are commercial considerations; you like to be either the first or the last story, and it's nice to be in a book with recognisably good writers. I would complain if I were in a book full of unknowns and schlock writers.

**LAKE:** On the grounds that you were there to sell them.

**HALDEMAN:** Yeah. It's happened once. Well no, not only me; Ray Lafferty was in it. It was one of those strange Roger Elwood collections; oh, awful! I tried to read the book and couldn't. My story in it was absolutely incomprehensible. He had to buy it because he'd been advertising the various science fiction writers he's bought stories from, always including my name, and I got really annoyed about this, and I said, 'Roger, you're going to have to buy a story from me now that you've done that.' I got really annoyed because he'd commissioned a story and had then refused it on the grounds that it had too-adult language in it - 'Why didn't you ask for childish writers?' So I had this story that had been rewritten for three different editors, and I didn't even understand it, so I sent it to him and dared him not to print it. And he did! It's called *John's Other Life*; it's got a few paragraphs that are pretty good, but I defy anybody to tell me what it's about!

**LAKE:** Talking about writing for a child audience, it seems to me that - at least for a teen audience - that is what you've done with *There Is No Darkness*, which you've written with your brother. I gather that one of you would write one chapter, the other would then rewrite as he felt like it and write the next, then the first would come back and rewrite the second chapter and write the third.

**HALDEMAN:** There was a sort of sending back and forth of ideas, and in fact we rewrote little of each other's prose. My brother's a very good pastiche artist, and so he came about ninety per cent toward my style and I came about ten per cent toward his natural style. You see the book originally was the first science fiction I'd ever written. After *War Year* came out I started writing *There Is No Darkness* under the title *Star School*. I wrote about forty pages of it and sent it to my editor who had done my mainstream novel, and she said, 'No young adult audience will like this; it's too violent...' So I just put it in a drawer for another twelve years. My brother finally reminded me that it was sitting there smouldering, or mouldering, in my files, and he asked whether he might take a look at it and we could do a collaboration, because he'd done a lot of collaboration, and I said sure, why not. And so we got into it and did write the book over a space of about eighteen months while we were both involved in other projects. We both have word processors, that have compatible data storage. Now he wants to do another one, but I don't want to do another collaboration. They want us to do a sequel for it; it's a tremendously successful book, *There Is No Darkness*.

**RIPPINGTON:** Do you find it difficult collaborating? I know when I write anything, I hate any body altering a word of it.

## H A L D E M A N

**HALDEMAN:** That's the thing. My brother is just as sensitive in that area as I am, so we didn't just go through and red pencil and change each other's sentences. What we normally did was add interlineations and paragraphs and so forth; I wouldn't change a line of his, or he of mine, without sending it back. I'd sit by the typewriter while I read it, and make little corrections and additions, and then I'd send them to him, and he would put in the ones that he agreed with. I talked to Boris Strugatski about a year ago, and asked him how he collaborated with his brother, since we had both done this. And he said they had tried everything, you know, alternating chapters, you write the book and I'll rewrite it, every possibility, and now what they do is, either Boris goes over to Arkady's house, or Arkady goes over to Boris's house, and one of them sits at a typewriter, and they argue line by line until they get the right thing out. Very Russian, in a way!

**LAKE:** And maybe it shows in some of the stories. I must say that *There Is No Darkness* reads very, very smoothly. It doesn't read in any sense as disjointedly as one expects occasionally to find in a collaboration.

**HALDEMAN:** Well, that's great. We both spent a lot of work on it. We didn't want it to be a thriller, and we did pursue it as a young adult book.

**LAKE:** Did you hear Chris Priest's GoH speech? It seemed to me that he was arguing that science fiction has been improperly and unfairly delimited and restricted in its definition by editors and publishers, and his own, much more relaxed definition of science fiction, or speculative fiction, should be the one that applies. Now your writing is very much more, in fact entirely, I would say, in the tradition of mainstream hard SF. Do you find that that is a restriction, or do your thoughts automatically run within traditional parameters?

**HALDEMAN:** Without completely disagreeing with Chris, or with you, I do choose as the symbolic means to tell my stories a lot of the trappings of hard SF. I am trained as a scientist, and a lot of the way that I look at the universe is coloured by having a technical training in physics and astronomy. And so even if I were writing a straight mainstream novel, that kind of sensibility would colour it.

**LAKE:** You tend to have things happening to people rather than people influencing things.

**HALDEMAN:** Well, that's my perception of fate.

**LAKE:** It's my belief that the people who set the tone of what one can regard as acceptable science fiction are not the editors, and not the publishers, but are the general public, which takes an awfully long time to change its own perceptions of what is acceptable SF... Now you have hit that basic mainstream, have caught the attention of the average science fiction reader.

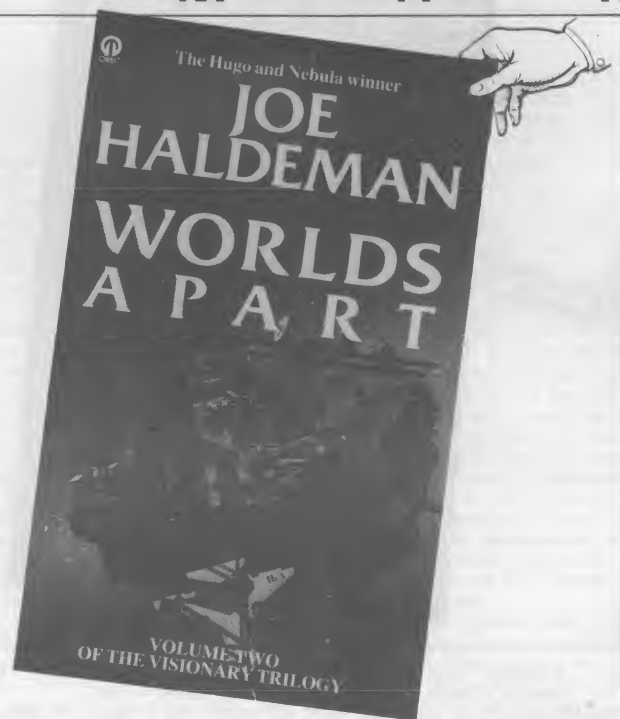
**HALDEMAN:** Well, one reason is that the key writers of my generation are hard science writers. My readers - a lot of them are twenty or thirty years older than I am, and a lot of them are teenagers, so there's the people who grew up on hard science, and the people who like the gadgetry and so forth. This seems to be a natural way for me to write. I don't disagree with Chris in his historical interpretation, that is, I see the ghettoisation, or even the balkanisation of science fiction as being something that was the direct result of the personalities of men like Gernsback and Campbell, and the marketing strategies that grew out of the rather narrow perceptions that they had of what made a good story. I can't disagree with that, and I can't disagree that I am influenced by it, because that's what I read when I was a kid, and that's what I grew up wanting to write.

**LAKE:** But you don't write with the shortcomings of the SF of the Golden Age.

**HALDEMAN:** Well no, but I've also got a Master's degree in English.

**LAKE:** My point is that Gernsback didn't publish crud, he published what he could get to fulfil a specific market, but when he published HG Wells he was publishing stuff that was superbly crafted.

**HALDEMAN:** Oh certainly...but did he publish Stapledon? It's odd, because obviously he could tell the difference between a good story and asshole crap. But I suppose I would prefer, now as a writer of fifteen years standing, that that had never happened, that we had kept the notion, like HG Wells, of being able to write science fiction within the mainstream of literature; but this is what we have.



**LAKE:** Everybody keeps trotting Stapledon out as an example, but Olaf Stapledon never read SF, he didn't know there was the genre in the world; he didn't submit his stuff to Gernsback; how can you criticise Gernsback for not publishing it?

**HALDEMAN:** He's one of the most enduring writers so far as I'm concerned. But I can see why the particular virtues that Stapledon has wouldn't be virtues that, ah -

**LAKE:** His visionary writings were a little too airy-fairy for that sort of market.

**RIPPINGTON:** I wouldn't write him off, though, because although the style is pretty awful, at least it had a vision, which is more than British SF even today has; it's very in-looking. But I've yet to see a British novel set in, say as *Worlds* is, in that sort of environment.

**LAKE:** Oh, I don't know, I mean, how about Arthur Clarke?

**ALL:** He's not British....! (laughter)

**LAKE:** No, but he was the major product of the B.I.S. in the pre-war and immediately post-war years when I entered SF. If Arthur can do it, surely other British people should be able to. But I think we become too cliquy, we all like to feel that we're avant-garde writers, and that there is some special kudos in being innovative, instead of producing a bloody good readable book.

**HALDEMAN:** Well...there's something to that, I'm sure.

**RIPPINGTON:** Do you actually live your books, while you're writing them?

**HALDEMAN:** Oh you do, you really fall into them. When I was writing *Mindbridge*, the women all have shaved heads when they go on expeditions, and I was writing and imagining and so forth, and I went down to the grocery store, still thinking furiously about this book, and I walked into the store, and here are all these women with long hair - it was a culture shock, because all the women I'd seen for the past eight hours didn't have any hair! My cat almost killed me when I was writing one of my spy novels. I was just typing along, this battle between a white shark and a killer whale, and I have them snapping jaws and fighting, and ooh, isn't this awful gory - and my chair had a little hole in the back, and the cat, who had never done this before, snuck up behind me and put both her paws on my ass, claws out, and my whole nervous system was geared up about sharks and teeth and everything - I almost dove over the typewriter and through the window! But yeah, even the cheap ones, even the simple novels, you have to get geared up on the action. or even the most intellectualised ones; it has to be real.

**LAKE:** It's got to be real, otherwise it doesn't sound real. I must say that you've convinced me in each of the milieux about which you've written.







# LEAVE THE FORGOTTEN TO THE NIGHT

BY

Christopher Priest

"If I was shown a class of children and asked, 'Can you pick out the future novelists?', I would look for the ones who are actually inarticulate...above all for the ones who do not show up very well, the people who back down in an argument and who then walk away inventing a new scenario for the argument that just happened." (John Fowles, *The Lively Arts*, October 1977)

ALL THROUGH MY LIFE I FEEL AS IF I HAVE BEEN BACKING DOWN and walking away to rewrite the argument. This is not a special virtue (quite the opposite, possibly), and it does not signify a passive approach to the rest of life. What it does mean is that by nature I am neither a leader of men nor a follower of others. A true "outsider" becomes a revolutionary, and entrepreneur, a pop singer or a criminal, while the natural "insider" is one who runs a small business, raises a family, saves with the Post Office and spends the weekends wallpapering the spare room. I have never been either of these, but I feel I fit awkwardly. When I heard John Fowles' remarks I considered it to be as true a definition as any of the peculiar, difficult psychology that marks many writers, myself among them.

How the trait manifests itself, at least in my own case, is in a form of individualism, but not the rugged variety that went out and built the empire. Mine is of an altogether more inward type: stubborn, egotistical, grumpy.

The first time I was aware of it affecting my attitude to writing was soon after I got going. The "New Wave" was all the rage. *New Worlds* was for a time the centre of everything, or seemed to be, and there was much heady idealism drifting in the air. With the idealism came a sort of consensus, formed by both major and minor personalities in the movement. It was hard to pin down, but it concerned the kind of issues young writers ought to stand for, the kinds of attitudes they should have, what they should be interested in, and - although this was routinely denied at the time - what they should be writing.

Something came into existence that I later dubbed the "Enjon Syndrome". Young writers of some promise but only moderate talent happily gave up their individualism to be able to tune someone else's guitar for a decade or so. A type of writing was emerging, and the type of writer who did it best was one who was prepared to relinquish something I was not. For a time I had been caught up in it all, but one day I somehow realized what was at stake. I backed away inarticulately, rephrasing the argument. In doing so I fell out with almost everyone. There were no sensational rows to intrigue the gossips; there was just muted resentment on all sides.

It reminded me of being at school, when I had decided neither sport nor swotting was in my line of business, and went my own way, getting interested in girls, smoking behind the gym, etc., and having the shit kicked out of me for doing so. Bullies are basically forces of authoritarianism and conformism, in literature as in school, and their hangers-on are their militia.

More recently I have been experiencing a similar feeling about the whole of the science fiction field. What once seemed to me an attractively adventurous place to be a writer now appears very conformist indeed...to the point where the old maxim, that science fiction was not as terrible as it appeared to be, has actually become the reverse: that science fiction is, and has no point unless it is, as terrible as it appears. In other words, if other words are needed, dare to write a piece of fiction that might stretch the definition of the genre a little, and you will have produced something that is no longer "real" science fiction. (Or, in the U.S.A, it will be something they are quick to call "British" science fiction...which is just as bad.) It was not always thus.

My instinct again is to go it alone.

Yet to do so is to create an irony for myself. Putting it as plainly as possible, the sort of books I want to write obviously have something in common with science fiction, even if no longer



"real", and what I write is most intelligently perceived by science fiction readers.

Like many writers (but not all) I don't especially like writing about my own work...nor, for that matter, talking about it. Instead, I prefer the safety of generalizations, and tend to talk about the generality of the other work around me.

This is actually a way of putting my own work at a remove, because in generalizing about "the field" or about "literature" or about "science fiction" a writer can talk in metaphor about his own work.

For instance, over the last few years I have sometimes spoken or written about the need for autobiographical content in science fiction...but this is only since my own books have been more overtly autobiographical in tone and subject, and thus it has become a subject of interest to me.

Now I have conveniently raised the subject, let me talk more directly about it.

Towards the end of the 1960s I started attending a class in writing that was being taught by the novelist Maureen Duffy. Her interest in autobiographical fiction was what you might call comprehensive. (Her own first novel was called *That's How It Was*, which is about as frank an admission of source as you will find.) Most of the other people in the class were writing novels, and every week there would be readings from some of them. What struck me forcibly was that almost all of these works in progress had broadly similar stories: they dealt with young people moving to London in the immediate post-war years, finding out about love, having their first sexual experiences, working in boring jobs, and so on. Most of the people in the class were of a similar age (mid-to late forties) and it seemed self-evident to me that the books they were writing were drawn if not from literal memories then certainly from ideas generated by experience.

I often felt uncomfortable listening to these passages. This was partly because some of them were acutely personal, but also because of a more principled feeling I had that fiction should be fiction, that it should spring from the imagination and not be a thinly fictionalized version of reality.



My surly individualism moved to the fore. I had been planning to write it soon anyway, but spurred on by my feelings about the class I started work on *Indoctrinaire*, a novel that is wholly imaginary, conceived and executed in the abstract. (One week I took a section of it along to the class, where it was received politely but without enthusiasm. Eighteen months after this the reviewers gave it the same kind of reception.)

*Fugue For A Darkening Island*, which followed a year or so later, was another abstract novel.

My interest in exploring personal images only really began (and then in an extremely tentative way) when I was writing *Inverted World*, which although in several respects is the closest thing I have ever written to "real" science fiction is actually powered by a small, hidden engine of autobiography.

I now see *Inverted World* as a turning point in my approach to writing. I could have gone on writing abstract books for ever, but they would have become increasingly arid and arbitrary as the years went by. *Inverted World*, which was based on of all things a mathematical equation, started life as perhaps the ultimate abstract novel, but it changed as it grew. My first two novels closed down possibilities for me when I had finished working on them; the third actually opened possibilities afterwards. Since then, I have been exploring memories with increasing interest.

So I had come by an individualistic route to a version of the Maureen Duffy approach. Yet I was not wholly there. I still had (and still have) no truck with fiction that draws on thinly disguised personal experiences. I continue to believe the power of the imagination is greater than the force of accurate journalism. After all, although life is reasonably long the variety of experience is restricted for most people, my own no less than anyone else's. But I do find that the further I get from the past the more it presents itself as fruitful imaginative material.

When I was about eleven years old I was pushed off my bicycle by another boy - the forces of conformism closing in, etc. I fell heavily, hit my head and suffered concussion. Although the worst physical injury I suffered was a badly grazed eye the incident left a much deeper scar. When I woke up in bed an hour or so later, not only had I no memory of the actual incident, but I was also suffering from what I now know is called retrograde amnesia. I could remember nothing at all of the four or five days leading up to the incident.

At first I didn't realize this, but when I returned to school I came across innumerable minor mysteries: I had written lessons in exercise books, homework I had handed in came back to me with marks on it, and so on. All was blank to me. I couldn't see how it was possible I could do something in full possession of my faculties, yet afterwards entirely forget having done it. All through childhood and adolescence this problem hung around in the back of my mind, but with the passage of time the experience seemed less important and I eventually forgot about it. (To this day, incidentally, I have never recovered those memories.)

A few years ago I was reading a book about the effects of shell-shock on the men in the trenches during the First World War. During the war shell-shock had been called neurasthenia and was deemed to be caused by congenital nervous disability (i.e. "weakness" in the face of adversity.) One of the symptoms associated with neurasthenia was retrograde loss of memory. Again, this was misunderstood at the time, and was believed to be a form of malingering. Victims of shell-shock were given a short leave, then sent back to the trenches. When the war was long over, psychological research caught up with the case histories, and shell-shock was at last understood for what it really was. It is now widely recognised that some forms of severe physical assault will cause amnesia, and the patient can be treated accordingly.

Because of my own minor encounter with the phenomenon I was fascinated to read of this, and it set me to thinking again about that enigmatic period during my tedious days at school, when I had done but could not afterwards remember doing. The whole nature of memory began to intrigue me, and the way in which it relates to how we perceive reality. So far, three novels - *A Dream of Wessex*, *The Affirmation* and *The Glamour* - have grown from this tiny seed. With hindsight I now see that *Fugue* (itself a word which means a dreamlike altered state, associated with amnesia) can also be partly attributed to the same personal source.

This incident is by no means the total autobiographical content of the novels, because otherwise they would be as abstracted as the first two, nor, indeed is autobiography all that is in them. It is one source of many, although for me it is an increasingly important and interesting one.

In 1982 I was in Holland for a science fiction convention, and along with Jack Vance and a few other writers I was interviewed for Belgian television. (Terrible things like this happen to you when you're abroad.) One of the questions we were

all asked was about our interest in the autobiographical content of fiction. My answer was much the same as I have written here, although somewhat more brief. Vance, when his turn came, said: "Autobiography! I'm not an egotist!" Well...I am, and the only difference between me and Jack Vance is that I will admit it and he won't.

The longer I go on writing the more it seems to me that the work of a novelist is to try to make sense in public of private turmoil (the turmoil of everyday life and prosaic experience that is shared by us all), and is thus an essentially egotistical act.

Some go too far, and some will not go far enough. Witness the dichotomy between, say, the phony strutting cockiness of someone like Harlan Ellison, and the equally false (but rather more attractive) humility of someone like Vance. I believe one of the most difficult tasks facing a writer is getting to grips with his subject matter, and so coming to terms with one's ego is a crucial step towards serious work. The more at ease a writer is with his ego, the better chance he has of dealing with it responsibly in his fiction. (This is possibly why the ludicrous posturings of Ellison make him widely and erroneously perceived as a raw-nerve "artist" - which is how he likes to see himself - and why Vance's self-effacement gives rise to the belief that he is an honest, diligent "craftsman" - ditto. Both perceptions are wide of the mark, although for differing but related reasons.)

What all this has to do with science fiction will seem to you (as increasingly it seems to me) rather remote.

I started this with a quotation from John Fowles, and took my title from a passage of Graham Greene's. Neither is a writer often summoned as a witness in the science fiction world. At least, not in public: I am only one of many writers you know who has learned a lot from both, and drawn much inspiration. Both are deeply autobiographical writers concerned with human processes. H.G. Wells was another, more widely read in the science fiction world. As I get older, I find writers like this speak more directly to me about the stuff of fiction writing, whereas the utterances of science fiction writers seem increasingly self-serving, misguided or abstract. Only a week or two ago I was reading a seriously written article by Isaac Asimov, in which he earnestly explained why characterization was not and should not be the concern of science fiction writers. How can any writer, however propped up by visions of achieved worldly success, believe such nonsense for even a moment?

And I find the same sense of irrelevance in what little science fiction I read these days. It seems to me that most contemporary science fiction is an end product: it has become a derived, secondary form, drawing on itself and the most banal influences, rendering itself into the literary equivalent of biodegradable plastic bottles.

The best fiction - at least the "best" in the sense writers use it, of providing the most creative input - is that which dares to chance, which cares nothing for genre or form or accepted wisdom. Chance is a fine thing, but science fiction writers have let chance be beaten out of them by the bully-boys of conformism. In my own time as a writer these forces have included: the opportunists who cashed in on the New Wave (the guitar tuners and the "dangerous" anthologists), *Science Fiction Writers of America* (which concentrates on the imperatives of marketing, and pauses only to suppress dissent and freedom of speech), the mass-market bestsellers (old men retreading the ground of their youth...and Mills & Boon tear-jerkers done up fancy with dragons, swords or wizards), and most recently of all the retreat of science fiction publishing, particularly in America, into specialized imprints (Daw, Tor and Blue Bore). All these impose conformism...or, worse still, pander to it.

My last three novels, and some of my stories, have dealt with various forms of delusion, and are about people who blind themselves to reality. These pieces of fiction grew from personal imagery and a private life, and were intended to be read as works of imaginary fiction. It would be specious to declare that they were disguised messages about a form of writing that once greatly stimulated and amused me, because in fact nothing could have been further from my mind while writing them. Afterwards, though, the parallels have not been lost on me, especially when those helpful chaps who review books for *Vector* and *Foundation* have pointed them out to me.

But in reality, however perceived, I still simply see myself in retreat, backing off, getting ready to rephrase the argument.



**HELLICONIA WINTER** - Brian Aldiss  
[Jonathon Cape, 1985, 285pp, £8.95]  
Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

THE GREAT YEAR DRAWS TO ITS CLOSE. BATALIX and Helliconia move away from Freyr towards apastron and a winter that will last five hundred of our years. A fractious humanity continues to squabble amongst itself despite the looming cold that threatens civilisation's very existence. Sparked by seasonal changes, the plague known as the Fat Death is beginning to ravage humanity and the phagors are once again coming into their own. What great leader, what all-embracing idea, can persuade the people to unite for their own sake against the winter that is soon to swallow them?

Such is what *Helliconia Winter*, the concluding volume in the 'Helliconia' trilogy, seems to promise, at least to judge from the overall thrust of the previous two volumes. *Helliconia Spring* shows us humanity emerging from a period of ice and ignorance and embarking on a climb back to the glories that winter had erased; *Helliconia Summer* showed us the moment of conceptual breakthrough as the people began to grasp the true history of their world and ponder how to control it; but *Helliconia Winter* doesn't quite fulfill the expected pattern of showing us how humanity at last comes to break the tyranny of the seasons. I'm uncertain why, but I half-suspect that at some point during the writing of the trilogy some new idea, one that was perhaps not abroad in the culture at the time the original scenario was drafted, became incorporated into the overall scheme in such a fashion as to subtly alter the theme and direction of the final volume - and, comparing the list of acknowledgments at the end of *Helliconia Winter* with that at the end of *Helliconia Spring*, it seems clear that the idea in question might be James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis (first popularised in *Gaia: A New Look at Life On Earth*, Oxford University Press, 1979).

Briefly, this hypothesis contends that the Earth itself is an organism of sorts, with the human species an integral part of the biosphere and as necessary to its functioning as all the other flora and fauna. Thus humanity can no more dominate the Earth than can the rhododendrons, for that would entail ceasing to function as part of the biosphere, separating ourselves from it altogether.

It should be obvious, therefore, that to apply the Gaia hypothesis to *Helliconia* is to greatly reduce the importance of the people's struggle against the winter, to render largely irrelevant the question of whether or not they do unite - and, because this is the basis of the plot, almost to undermine it.

A little harsh, perhaps, particularly as the focus this time is on one character rather than several, with the result that such larger questions are addressed indirectly when they're addressed at all. Luterin Shokerandit participates in the last pitched battle to be fought in this Great Year. Charged with carrying news of the victory and of the spreading Fat Death, he is waylaid by another Sibornalese officer, Harbin Rashnalgid, who informs him that the entire army is to be massacred to prevent it bringing the Fat Death into Sibornal with it. The bulk of the rest of the novel is taken up with Shokerandit's journey back to the family home near Kharabhar, a travelogue of great colour and action: interspersed with updates of events on Avernus, the Earth Observation Station that orbits Helliconia, and of Earth itself.

Quite a lot about Earth itself, in fact, amounting to little short of a history of Earth since the commencement of interstellar flight but, in contrast to the richly imagined narrative that unfolds against the lavishly described background

# BOOKS

Reviews edited by  
Paul Kincaid



## HELLICONIA WINTER



of the thoroughly believable Helliconia, these interludes are mere sketches; short and to the point, certainly, but thus rather dry and uninviting. Racing through the centuries, it climaxes with a philosophical discussion between three of our descendants in which the possessive, domineering ways of present-day mankind are compared with the possessive, domineering ways of the Helliconians. The implication being, presumably, that they are not a mature culture in the same way that we are not a mature culture.

One can always be certain with Aldiss that he won't take the easy way out, that he'll come up with something that requires work from his readers. And simply fulfilling the expectations that the first two volumes had created would have been altogether too easy. But I stand by my earlier claim that the Gaia hypothesis acts almost to render the Helliconians' struggle completely meaningless by suggesting that there is little point to individual human effort; and comes close to canceling out the wonderfully life-affirming message of *Helliconia Spring* that individuals do matter, regardless of what the universe may get up to.

Is *Helliconia Winter* therefore a disappointing conclusion to the 'Helliconia' trilogy? Conscious that I'm imposing my own perceptions upon what Aldiss is doing, and that in any case it's illegitimate to criticise a novel for not being something it didn't set out to be, this is a question that I'd rather defer answering. I will say, though, that if 'Helliconia' had been invented by anyone else, the present novel would probably be entitled *Helliconia Autumn*, and in the 'real' *Helliconia Winter* we'd be told

precisely how civilisation had managed to either survive or perish. By stopping at this point Aldiss ensures that *Helliconia* is not reduced to the status of a mere fictional backdrop for a series of colourful adventures. Rather, it remains larger than the novels written about it; for every page of description we read another ten or twenty or more remain unwritten, perhaps unknown, which means that if we want to know any more about it then we'll have to imagine it ourselves.

And while imagining it ponder again on the message *Helliconia's* Great Year holds for our own civilisation.

**THE MAN IN THE TREE** - Damon Knight  
[Gollancz, 1985, 246pp, £8.95]  
Reviewed by Chris Bailey

SO, DAMON KNIGHT. A BIG NAME SURELY, although the credentials are rather elusive. This elusiveness is partly our fault for putting the weight of our approbation behind the novel and in this class Knight has produced but infrequently and indifferently. I recall cautiously friendly reviews of the novel before the present one, *The World and Thorinn* (which I believe must be a fix-up of earlier short material) and I have more recent recollections of the novel after this one, just serialized in F & SF -titled CV, it is a rotten potboiler. Yet otherwise, Knight's references are impeccable. He is an excellent short story writer, a renowned editor and anthologist and a significant critic. Milford and Clarion further endorse the writerly authority.

And so I would like to be able to tell you that this time Knight has written the novel that will seal his reputation, but I cannot do that. Nevertheless, there is plenty to admire and enjoy in *The Man in the Tree*.

Gene Anderson, a nine-year-old boy living in a small Oregon town during the 1950s, quarrels with another boy, the bullying Paul Cooley, and accidentally kills him. No guilt and no innocence attach to Gene, because he is in command of forces he is as yet incapable of understanding, and it is uncertain as to whether or not these contributed to Paul's death. All Gene knows is that he can reach into parallel worlds to extract objects that duplicate those around him - handy when he needs a dime - but this incident is the first indication that he may possess other powers. Afraid to return home, he hides himself in the hills and woods, building a tree-house to live in.

The freak in the woods...this is *More Than Human* territory, yet I intend no charge of derivativeness, because these opening episodes of *The Man in the Tree* are quite individual and quite masterly; warm, sensitive and written in a simple and expressive prose that is rich with images of small town life and the colour of the surrounding countryside, in all a glowing evocation of childhood and "the world of small things". Rewarding characters emerge too, notably the dead boy's father, Tom Cooley, and with Cooley's scheme to avenge his son, Knight lays the foundations for an intriguing study. Cooley is vicious, cunning and unprincipled, and yet, when all is said and done, he is motivated by love.

Cooley's first assassination attempt forces Gene to flee to San Francisco and then New York, where he meets and studies with a bohemian crowd of artist. It seems proper that he should study art in his transition from backward boy to adult, learning the guileful skills of representation necessary for the city. However, his progress is halted by the death of his teacher and lover, the sculptor Avila, and he is on the road again, this time joining a travelling carnival show.

At this point I started feeling uneasy. It should be explained that Gene is



well-developed for his age - indeed, by the time he reaches adulthood, he is over eight feet tall. Why does Knight find this necessary? Gene has an interesting discussion with the Lizard Man about the place of the freak in human society, but the conclusions drawn are tangential to the direction one shortly finds the book to take. Knight has a messianic end in mind for Gene (Michael Valentine Smith's education also included a spell "on the carnies") and I considered it interesting that he should have to make Gene literally loom large in the imagination before he could tackle the character. Perhaps he feels that the masses will only respond to a physically outstanding figure.

As the consequence of another fiendishly ingenious but futile murder attempt by Cooley, Gene leaves the carnival, and at this point the narrative fragments to such an extent that I will need some convincing if told that Knight

did not put the book aside for a while before returning to it in a different frame of mind. Gene is now episodically seen wandering the world, and one begins to fear the worst when a scene in which he admires an artist's Crucifixion, "hanging under the weight of its pain, mouth open in a rictus and the sweat of death on its skin" is followed immediately by a discussion of the world's problems, notably overpopulation.

We next meet Gene at any length once he is installed in a customized Florida mansion - he has graduated beyond the duplication of mere greenbacks - surrounded by doting camp followers and holding forth to all and sundry, and irresistibly evoking the spirit of bloody old Jubal Harshaw and his harem. Aware now of the full extent of his powers, Gene embarks on a world-saving programme, and almost the only scene of interest in this latter half of the book comes when he debates with himself his

fitness for this role: "Which was worse, to save humanity for the wrong reasons - or to let it perish through cowardice?". Suffice to say that Knight rides over Gene's reluctance. Cooley reappears but summarily, which is symptomatic of the nature of this part of the book, for his previous pursuit of Gene gave the story a narrative drive and tension it now lacks. The final pages somewhat redeem (as it were) what has gone immediately before, but the last impression is that *The Man in the Tree* says little that is not said by *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

**THE GODS THEMSELVES** - Isaac Asimov

[Gollancz, 1985, 288pp, £8.95]

**REACH FOR TOMORROW** - Arthur C. Clarke

[Gollancz, 1985, 166pp, £8.95]

Reviewed by Mark Greener

ASIMOV AND CLARKE HAVE COME TO REPRESENT SF in the mind of the general public. However, their reputation rests on work produced in the "Golden Age" when critical standards were lower and it is improbable that they would gain such a reputation today.

These books are both reprints; the Clarke reprinting short stories originally published in the pulps of the forties and fifties, the Asimov a reissue of a novel first published in 1972. What becomes obvious from a comparison of the two books is how little hard SF evolved in the intervening 30 years. It is possible to exonerate Clarke on the grounds that he was writing at a time when SF was the result of different sociological forces than those in operation in the early seventies. Asimov has no such excuse. 'Gods' was written after the advent of the new wave and Asimov should have appreciated the different critical standards that availed as a result.

The stories in *Reach For Tomorrow* range from the readable (*The Fires Within*) to the abysmal (*Jupiter Five*). What becomes quickly obvious is that Clarke is able to write better short stories than novels as he has a greater understanding of the limitations and conventions of short story writing; the perfect illustration of this being the transformation of *The Sentinel* into *2001*. Although few of the stories raise any questions about the human condition, they are on the whole readable and it is quite possible to while away a few enjoyable hours with this book. However, I feel the nine pound price tag is unjustified and the book would have been better presented as a paperback.

On the other hand it would have been better if Asimov's *The Gods Themselves* had not been reissued at all. The story concerns the construction of an 'electron pump' which proves to be the panacea for Earth's energy crisis. The invention was prompted by messages sent by aliens from a parallel universe. Officially the pump is considered to produce a symbiosis between the two universes. However it is soon realised that the continued use of the pump will lead to the destruction of our solar system....

Asimov hints that social changes accompanied the implementation of the pump, but these are not examined in any depth. He mentions the cultural differences between the inhabitants of the Moon colony and those of Earth. However these differences are cosmetic and Asimov misses the potential allegory for our present society. The characterisation is weak, the characters being the archetypal stereotypes of hard SF and the aliens, around which the whole book revolves are neither convincing nor alien, their society being analogous to ours. Again the potential for allegory is

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missed. The prose is turgid and the plot has neither pacing nor significant development. The ending when it eventually arrives is a relief.

The most worrying aspect of the novel is the fact that the SF world vindicated the book's existence by awarding it the Hugo and Nebula, which implies to the outside world that this was the best SF novel of 1972. As such the continued existence of this book can only serve to harden the unjustified artistic prejudices which exist against SF and prevent it being taken seriously as an artform.

Neither the Asimov nor the Clarke are books which will further the cause of SF and when taken in a historical context show hard SF for what it is: the primitive scribbles of an art before it matured.

Knight has been outlining those conditions and qualities necessary in a saviour, should one walk the earth again. He goes some way towards achieving this - especially in the earlier part of the book comparing Gene's attributes to those of an artist or a magician - yet it is also possible that the world itself is not amenable to such an exercise. Take the issue of overpopulation mentioned above. Much recent analysis suggests that it is not so much this as the distribution of the earth's resources that is the difficulty, yet Knight is content to put the clock back twenty years and aver that overpopulation is *prima facie* the world's number one crisis. It seems that global problems must be simplified to an unacceptable extent to be accommodated within the simplistic solution of a messianic deliverance.

Read **The Man in the Tree** by all means, and enjoy the first 130 pages as much as I did. Be warned however that it is a measure of the expectations engendered by those pages that what follows may be considered a disappointment.

**OCTAGON** Fred Saberhagen

[Penguin, 1985, 272pp, £2.50]

**STARMAN** Alan Dean Foster (from a screenplay by Bruce A. Evans and Raynold Gideon)

[Corgi, 1985, 192pp, £1.95]

**SUNDIVER** David Brin

[Bantam, 1985, 340pp, £1.95]

Reviewed by Tom A. Jones

BACK IN THE 60S THE CRY WAS TO GET SF OUT of the ghetto. I don't think we quite understood all the implications of that desire. We wanted SF to become part of the 'mainstream' of literature, equating 'mainstream' with Sunday Times book reviews, Nobel prizes and university literature courses. Of course, there is no such thing: literature is a collection of genre - SF, fantasy, spy, thriller, detective, domestic, etc. These three books provide three different examples of SF which also fall within the scope of other genres.

Fred Saberhagen is best known for his Berserker stories, and if you weren't aware of this one of the characters in **Octagon** tells you. Mr. Saberhagen also calls a company pivotal to the plot Berserkers Inc. Whilst this isn't a Berserker story these are fairly heavy signals to the reader about the main theme of the plot.

This book is set in today's world, most of the hardware exists. Whilst I don't know of any sentient computers, the idea is no longer fantastic, it is a standard theme within high tech thrillers. The plot revolves around a postal adventure game, Starweb. Starweb is a real game, and this mixing of fact and fiction is another trait of the high tech thriller. The plot is very simple: Starweb players start to die and

Alex Barlow is sucked in to try and find out why. Government computer networks, research establishments, 'robots', eccentric millionaires are all mixed in and are pretty typical ingredients of the high tech thriller.

The plot relies on a lot of coincidences; the biggest, revealed near the end of the book, is the cause of the whole situation. I won't reveal it, but a lot of you will guess. There are too many coincidences and some so outrageous that I could not believe in this book.

Characterisation is minimal. A pity, as Caroline the wheelchair-bound cripple could have been interesting; but the difficulties of the disabled are hardly touched on, her environment having been tailored to her needs. This is in line with both the high tech thriller and much of SF, unpleasant parts of reality which the hero can't easily deal with can provide background but mustn't intrude into the main thrust of the plot.

This book isn't SF anymore, it is a high tech thriller but not a very good one. Whilst the plot hooks are there, it lacks the appropriate writing technique found in the best of this genre.

Let's move to **Starman**, the novel from one of this year's predicted blockbuster moves. Again a simple plot: Voyager II is picked up by highly advanced aliens who decode the record it contains including the invitation to "drop by". The aliens visit Earth and send down an explorer but his lander is detected and shot down by US jets. The alien survives and takes on the form of a human, the deceased husband of the heroine, Jenny Hayden. The alien forces Jenny to drive him across America to his pick-up point; they have adventures along the way and are pursued by the military. During the journey the relationship between Jenny and the alien changes from kidnapper/kidnappee to close friendship.

I was unhappy with the number of inconsistencies. Why do most of the aliens' super science powers require the use of a 'magic marble', good for one go only, but the ability to repair machines is achieved by the laying on of hands? Also, the alien appears to resurrect a deer without the use of a marble while mending Jenny's wounds requires not only a marble but considerable internal energy. The similarity between the alien's abilities and some of the New Testament miracles is a little heavy handed.

The alien's horror at the fact that we kill and eat animals seems overdone for someone who is not only an experienced explorer but has been studying Earth with remote probes. There are also references to our use of animals in experiments. Whatever your own views, I was left with the feeling that this 'message' was there for commercial reasons, perhaps I'm just too much of a cynic.

I'd also like to know what the alien had intended to do if he'd landed where he was supposed to land, and the non-explanation for there being a limited number of special places where the ship could pick him up seems to cater to the semi-mystic community.

The style is straightforward, pacy, competent prose; reading some of the SF published, producing this is an accomplishment in itself. Presumably Mr. Foster's ability to write like this is one of the reasons he is chosen to do these film novelisations. If this sounds snide or critical it isn't meant to; the ability to write clean prose should be respected.

Anyone who has seen an SF film over the past few years or one of the TV offerings will be familiar with the trappings of this tale. The plot,

characters and effects are no longer special to the SF domain and the book/film aren't aimed at the SF reader. This SF for the non-SF fan is a relatively new genre and seems linked to the treatment of the various aspects which make up the story, as the basic 'alien amongst us' theme can still be treated as 'pure' SF.

Finally, **Sundiver**. First the plot. Mankind is in touch with a number of alien races. Each of these has been helped to sentience by an already sentient race who in their turn were helped and so on back to the original race, the Progenitors. Thus there are Patron and Client races and this process is called Uplift. Mankind is the odd man out having no obvious Patron, and is thus thought strange and is only tolerated because he has uplifted chimpanzees and dolphins. The other races rely to a great extent on the Library, a repository of all galactic knowledge; strange mankind does research. You may recognise this process of uplift from Von Daniken's books, and within this novel those who believe man once had Patrons are called Danikenites.

With this background the hero Jacob Demwa goes to help the Sundiver team on Mercury who have been investigating the sun and may have found 'creatures'. These creatures may be sentient, perhaps they are mankind's original Patrons. Add to this a cast of aliens and humans, who may not be what they seem, put in some interesting background touches and we have a solid SF book - yes? No.

This book is a murder mystery of what I'll call the country house type. The form is followed even to the point of all the suspects being gathered into one room for the denouement. In fact this happens twice. I'm not giving anything away as the first one happens about 100 pages before the end and it's obvious that not all has been revealed.

As such it's not bad and in truth there are other books which fit into both genres but none spring to mind which stick so closely to the mystery format.

Unfortunately there are two stylistic traits which I hated. One was a tendency for a character to begin an explanation but not finish it. Sometimes the character just rambles on, often for several pages, and we're supposed to figure it out; okay providing you could still remember the point of the explanation. Sometimes someone or something interrupts and there's a switch to a new topic, no matter how important the original had been. Sometimes something dramatic happens, often signalled by the chapter ending abruptly. I found this increasingly annoying as the book went on.

Even worse is the author's occasional descent to hideous prose: "One of the things he could remember best about his adolescence was the asolopsistic roar of starry nights". What? Anyone know what "asolopsistic" is, my Oxford doesn't and I'd like to know what I missed in my adolescence.

Three examples of cross genre novels, none completely successful and none enhancing the SF genre, although **Sundiver** could have been interesting if it hadn't been marred by its stylistic faults.

**THE SCIENCE FICTION OF MARK TWAIN** edited by David Ketterer

[Clio Press, 55 St Thomas St, Oxford, 1985, 412pp, £30.16]

Reviewed by Keith Freeman

AN IMPRESSIVELY SIZED BOOK, 9in BY 6in, with its 1 inch thickness made up of "Introduction & Notes" (33 pages), "Explan-



atory Notes" (40 pages) and Selected Bibliography sandwiching nearly 340 pages of stories. I've not weighed it (how many readers had begun to think I would?) but I certainly do not recommend that this book should be read in bed.

The editor's avowed intention is to show that Mark Twain should be considered 'instead of Wells as the major turning point in the tradition leading to modern SF' (page xiii). Thus I see this book as having two purposes - firstly to entertain the reader with the quality of the examples of Mark Twain's work and, secondly, to show, with these same examples, the proof of this statement.

Whilst reading this Introduction I became irritated by the fact that the 'footnotes' weren't footnotes but notes and appeared, all 50 of them, after the Introduction. To let the eye skip down from the middle of a paragraph to look at a footnote disturbs the concentration; having to turn several pages ruins it. Allowing for this the Introduction gave me food for thought; it even skates over the definition of SF and gives a very sketchy literary biography of Mark Twain. Mark Twain's plots are mentioned and compared with those of several well-known modern SF authors (Vonnegut, Dick, Heinlein and Aldiss amongst them).

So we come to the 'meat', and start with *Petrified Man*. The one possible reason for not putting footnotes becomes apparent - they are now in the 'Explanatory Notes' that appear after page 339, and this half-page story generates a full page of them! I do not intend to comment on each story, which varies from the first, half page one, to ones of 90 odd pages and includes part of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. It is perhaps significant that several stories have only been published posthumously and moreover published in 'academic' (as opposed to 'popular') books. There are also what the editor calls "fragments from Mark Twain's notebooks" - ideas for stories and small portions of stories. Any professional writer, if not all writers, would tend to have ideas and parts of stories, plots or 'scenes' scribbled down - and I'd suspect the majority of these scraps would stay as just that. I don't think the reputation of Mark Twain has been enhanced in any way by the revelations not only in this book but also the others where these fragments have been disinterred.

Mark Twain is basically a humourist and is renowned as such although I'd wager more people know of him today than actually read his books and stories. With any collection of stories by one author there is a danger that what, in one story, can be considered funny, or artful or whatever begins, by the second or third, to irritate and annoy. The first time you come across a mixed-up slice of history ("He was with Columbus in the Mayflower and assisted him in discovering America and Livingstone" - page 177) it can amuse. When the same device is used in the next story it isn't so funny - though if the reading of the stories were separated by sufficient time I can well imagine greeting such a passage affectionately as one would an old friend. The same applies to an author's individual style of writing; and here, unmistakably, there is what can only be called, today, an old-fashioned very verbose style.

Does the book entertain? There are several good stories but, overall, I don't think so. Does the book succeed in putting Mark Twain amongst the pantheon of 'Early SF Influences'? - again I don't think so. Basically Mark Twain used SF trappings but lacked the logical consistency and vision

of an SF author. His primary aim is either to be humorous or to make sociological comment - and any logic is immediately sacrificed in order to pander to these two aims. This is, perhaps, surprising when it is remembered that Samuel Clemens was, besides being Mark Twain, an inventor and, indeed, held several patents. Where David Ketterer outlines a plot the SF aspect is clear, but reading the story that particular aspect is usually hidden under a welter of ideas, subplots and detail that nullify the whole thing. **3,000 Years Amongst the Microbes** (for example) is compared to *Fantastic Voyage* (film, then Asimov's adaptation). On reading the story the 'invasion of a human body by a human-turned-into-a-microbe' does not try to convey the wonders of the human body but quickly introduces lots of different microbes (all appearing human) and their cats and dogs(!). The human body is, thereafter, used as a background 'funny map' with microbes coming from 'the Republic of Getrichquick' and areas identified as 'Shoulder Range', 'Great Lone Sea' and such like.

#### COLSEC REBELLION - Douglas Hill

[Gollancz, 1985, 121pp, £5.50]

Reviewed by Helen McNabb

THIS IS A JUVENILE BOOK, AIMED AT CHILDREN aged about 8 to 13 I should guess and as such I think it works fairly well. I tried to remember the kind of SF I was reading at that age and this compares reasonably with Andre Norton, James Blish and Heinlein's juveniles. It is volume 3 of a trilogy so the main characters are already familiar to many of the readers although it stands independently enough as a story. Its strong points are an active space opera plot with the five teenage protagonists playing a suitably important but not wildly improbable part in saving the world. The children are all from different gangs which have taken over parts of a hard-pressed Earth, so they represent a gang/youth culture which is anti-Establishment which is a bit different and very non-Enid Blyton, although as the Establishment is completely corrupt and self-seeking it shouldn't worry any anxious parents or teachers unduly. Its failures are the characters which are made from fairly thin cardboard and the writing is no more than adequate although it doesn't jar particularly. All in all it's a readable adventure, it avoids condescension and most platitudes although it doesn't have any extra sparkle either unfortunately.

#### COMET HALLEY - Fred Hoyle

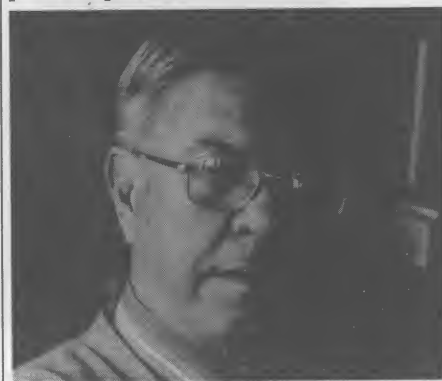
[Michael Joseph, 1985, 410pp, £9.95]

Reviewed by Edward James

PROFESSOR SIR FRED HOYLE HAS FOR A LONG time been fascinated by the possibility of intelligent life in space: actually in space, that is, not on planets. His first novel *The Black Cloud* (1957) and his latest, published on his 70th birthday, are both about the problems and consequences of contacting such life-forms. Indeed, in some ways things have changed very little. A British scientific team establishes radio contact with an alien, inorganic, intelligence in space; that alien causes a political and environmental crisis on Earth; the novels end on a tone of (unspecified) optimism. The protagonist is still a scientist in Cambridge - a town which is, if anything, even more the centre of Hoyle's universe now than it was in 1957. (It is a scientific hypothesis which,

despite Copernicus, is still widely believed by Cambridge academics.)

There is in this novel more attention to the politics than the science; plausibility is not something that Hoyle seems particularly worried about. He is driven by astronomical necessity to place *Comet Halley* in 1986, but held back by caution (or libel laws) from making this 1986 much like the one that will be there by the time this is a paperback. He peoples 1986 with men and women we don't know, although we certainly recognise some of the stereotypes or (in the case of the Americans and Russians) caricatures. British politics are presented in a totally grey and neutral manner, summed up in the figure of the Prime Minister, whose ideology is unclear (perhaps it's an Alliance premier?), and whose sex (as far as I can see) is cunningly concealed by never referring to him/her/it by name or by personal pronoun.



MICHAEL JOSEPH

But this ambiguity is perhaps partly to do with the strangely non-visual view of the world which Hoyle has. A few of the characters are described, but only perfunctorily; some have verbal tics to distinguish them, but none have physical ones. Apart from a few glimpses of a lively Cambridge, the landscape is just as unreal. There is very little sense of place at all: sadly for me, since *Comet Halley* shares the dubious and unimportant distinction with Penelope Lively's *The House at Norham Gardens* of having a protagonist who lives in a street in which I've lived myself - Adams Road, Cambridge.

For all that, it is in many ways a much more successful book than *The Black Cloud*. Hoyle's writing is much less wooden; his characters are less inclined to lecture; and he doesn't bother with mathematical calculations in footnotes, as in 1957. The action moves along at a cracking pace, and there is plenty of it. And to complain about the lack of realism is probably to miss the point. Despite all the science, this is a fantasy, in the same sense that the James Bond books were fantasies. Or a better comparison might be with the Michael Innes detective fantasies. Not just because of the high-table wit or the Oxbridge background (and Hoyle's scene of a murdered academic found in a moonlit Trinity College Chapel, his finger still depressing an organ key, could come straight out of Innes), but because of the way in which Hoyle uses the novel as a vehicle for wry comment upon his own world.

In some ways he views it with more tired amusement than in 1957. His spies or politicians with a classical or literary education are tolerated, and the irony of it is relished. One undercover agent quotes an Horatian ode, translates it for the PM and comments 'That's real Foreign Office stuff. Fits you for understanding the



world' (p.303); the Treasury mandarin Sir Harry Julian makes only one pertinent comment about the scientific aspects of the Comet Halley crisis, and that is a quotation from Archimedes, in Greek. (Elsewhere, p.355, he misquotes his Greek, but presumably that is Sir Fred's fault, not Sir Harry's. Fred's only a scientist, poor chap.) But elsewhere he seems rather more in despair about the current state of science and society in this country, as shown by his enjoyable swipes at government cynicism, university administrators, research councils (pp. 32, 289), economics (p.236), cabinet leaks (pp.299-300), or the House of Commons (p.370).

The metaphor evoked three times, comparing the late twentieth century to the late fifteenth, our modern society 'rotting just as society was rotting in the fifteenth century', and needing a new Columbus to revitalise it, may be historically highly suspect, but seems to be the key to the book. It is interesting that our two most distinguished scientific SF writers, Clarke and Hoyle, both have this vision of the transformation of society by 'first contact'. But Hoyle (or his hero) seems to have a much less optimistic view of the future than Clarke: only a *deus ex machina* can save us from self-destruction. Let us hope that he is as wrong in that as he has been in most of his scientific predictions...

**VAIL** - Trevor Hoyle  
[John Calder, 1985, 188pp, £4.95]  
Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

'VAIL HAD BEEN IN LONDON LESS THAN A fortnight and had been accosted four times by the police. Each time he had given them a different name, address and occupation. Either they were incompetent or the national computer wasn't functioning properly, or his luck was just too good to be true.'

Picture, if you will, a Britain not so very different to today. London and the gilded South East prosper under the benevolent gaze of a strong lady Prime Minister. Tourists unload their millions on an increasingly tatty but VAT-free Oxford Street. The media circus says that it's all for the best in the best of all possible worlds, except when it isn't and then it is their fault. Sports stars and showbiz personalities cruise the motorways in chauffeur-driven limousines. As for the rest of us, we live on the other side of the wire, North of Watford Gap, kept away from Merrie Olde England by check points and enthusiastic thugs in uniform. We have been infected deliberately with AIDS to solve the queer problem (wonder what they'll do with all those echoing, empty public schools?...). And it is (unannounced) policy to encourage social Darwinism by dumping toxic and nuclear waste secretly on our back doorsteps.

Now I yield to no man in my despising of the rancid, ignorant, vengeful bigotry that is the soul of Thatcherism, and I do believe that when it comes to waste disposal it is a question of 'out of sight of the Home Counties, out of mind'. But the very heart of satire is accuracy, and at vital moments Hoyle is woefully inaccurate. For instance, he has a supposedly high-powered computer boffin chattering away in BASIC, a fine and useful computer language but for the purposes of production it is useless. Wayne Dake would talk C at the least, probably Cobol (oh yes, and it isn't a PROM, Mr. Hoyle, it's an EPROM). Which may be a minor quibble but it is fairly typical of the slapdash attitude of the

whole book. Then we see the Prime Minister well into a typically blood-curdling speech when she says 'Children who watch and revel in video nasties are income tax dodgers in the making'. Think about that. Mrs. Thatcher, before she went into government, was, along with eleven members of her first cabinet, a tax lawyer. In Thatcherite terms income tax dodging isn't a crime, it is a patriotic duty! Mr. Hoyle might be advised to go back to Swift (or even Steve Bell) and remind himself that true satire depends upon distortion of ugly truth, not convenient fantasy.

I do not doubt Mr. Hoyle thinks he has written a fine, funny, crusading book, and in places it does show the unregarded ugly side of contemporary Britain. Vail, his wife murdered by a terrorist he gave a lift to on the M1, his only child dying in his arms as a result of all that toxic waste, is treated to a technicolour living Daily Mail sermon from the good customers of St. Neots' Waitrose in a passage which is wickedly accurate, when all he wants to do is steal some food for his dying daughter. But this illuminated incident is all too rare in a tale which prefers to go for the easy target - mercenary media folk who fuck (up) anything that moves, and can't move without cocaine; venal politicians; policemen who would be frightening if they weren't such bunglers; terrorists who are no different to the police. We know all this, we've heard it all before and sung to a better tune. There is a soft centre at the heart of this hard-bitten tale which is in no way hidden by Hoyle's making Vail into an amoral Candide, quite happy to take the smooth with the rough.

The writing, too, is uneven, as though Hoyle couldn't decide whether he was writing a political satire, a near-future horror story or a spy thriller. At odd moments the writing takes off. For instance, Vail takes a drug given to him by a weirdo at Sandbach Service station. As a result of this he encounters Spaghetti Junction much as most might encounter the Bermuda Triangle, and has an encounter at a deserted Watford Gap with Gene Vincent, Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison and Elvis Presley who are centaurs with Harley Davidsons rather than horse legs. This passage is at once odd, amusing, frightening and powerful, an indication that when he sets his mind to it Hoyle can write with real imagination. Thereafter, though, the sinews are very soft.

It is something of a commentary that this book - no better written than the average SF book, and certainly far less well-constructed than the works of, say, Garry Kilworth or Rob Holdstock - receives Arts Council support whereas many works with a genuinely imaginative approach to the world struggle to be published. It seems as though, much as it was sufficient to get a job in early Hollywood to be Hungarian, it is sufficient to be published by the 'serious' imprints (who wouldn't touch SF with yours, ducky) to express the appropriate political sentiments with no expletives deleted. For myself I agree with Sam Goldwyn, it isn't enough to be Hungarian, one must also be talented. This unpleasant, uneven book falls a long way short of most of its readily attainable targets and I cannot recommend it.

**HAUNTED TRAVELLERS** - Edited by Denys Val Baker (190 pp)  
**GHOSTS FROM THE MIST OF TIME** - Ronald Chetwynd-Hayes (205pp)  
**TUNE IN FOR FEAR** - Edited by Peter Haining (192pp)  
**WHEN DUSK COMES CREEPING** - Lanyon Jones (190pp)

[William Kimber, 1985, £7.50 each]  
Reviewed by Paul Kincaid

THE 41 HORROR STORIES IN THESE FOUR collections show how well the form suits the subject. In 20 pages or so there is just room to present characters within a situation, create a shiver of unease, and end it with a gruesome denouement or a twist in the tail. There are the occasional attempts at fine writing - and even the odd success - but as often as not these add nothing to the story, and may even detract from it. Those that work best are plain, journeyman prose.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about these stories, however, is their settings. Remote, bleak locations; windswept Cornwall, the wilds of northern moorland. The crumbling country mansions or gaunt castles far from human ken are not simply traditional, creepy settings, but a conscious or subconscious removal of the story from modern life. All but a very few have a contemporary setting, yet barely any of them occupy a recognisable urban milieu, and those which do are the least successful. More than ghosts linger from ages past, even in the most modern of these tales. Lanyon Jones, for instance, one of the youngest of the writers, seems more at ease in a Trollopean world of cathedrals and county towns bypassed by the 20th century, or in the enclosed, backward-looking atmosphere of a public school. His second collection of stories, *When Dusk Comes Creeping*, contains some effectively chilling tales; though his attempt to find a dark significance beneath nursery rhymes and popular songs hardly matches Angela Carter's supreme achievement in this same area with *The Bloody Chamber* (1979).

Jones's 'The Coastguard', however, is easily the most authentically creepy of the stories in the best of these collections, *Haunted Travellers*. It must be said, though, that among these accounts of journeys and ghosts there are several with predictable punchlines, or no punchline at all. And I do wonder how Edgar Allen Poe's 'A Descent into the Maelstrom' and R. Chetwynd-Hayes' unusual vampire tale, 'The Labyrinth', qualify for a collection of ghost stories. Chetwynd-Hayes' own collection, *Ghosts from the Mist of Time*, does include some very good ghost stories, especially 'Time Check'. In others such as 'Cold Fingers' and 'The Echo', though, he indulges a preference for the baroque and the grotesque that doesn't always work.

In *Tune in for Fear*, Peter Haining has collected stories from the golden age of radio, when a scary tale was a regular part of the family's entertainment. The most recent dates from 1951. Several have been extensively anthologised before; the savagely edited version of *The War of the Worlds* does no favours to Wells, or to the famous Orson Welles broadcast it is meant to represent; and few make anything like the impact they are supposed to have. Popular tastes change, in being scared as in other things; but it must be said that these stories don't have the chill created by their more recent fellows in the other three collections.

**THE SABLE MOON** - Nancy Springer  
[Corgi, 1985, 263pp, £1.95]  
Reviewed by Barbara Davies

I'LL COME CLEAN - THIS IS THE THIRD BOOK IN *The Book of Isle* trilogy - and I haven't read the first two (*The White Hart* and *The Silver Sun*). I'm also certain that someone with a sound knowledge of mythology would have read it on a deeper level than I was able to. However, if you want a layman's



opinion, read on.

This is a 'Quest' story - with a map, glossaries and a family tree. I would not go as far as Marion Zimmer Bradley who says 'in a class with Donaldson's *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*' or as far as Lynn Abbey who says 'a shimmering tapestry of magic and song', but I will say that *The Sable Moon* is like the 'curate's egg' - good in parts. In short - it is an average fantasy.

In essence, it is the story of Prince Trevyn of Isle - from the day he leaves home in a fit of adolescent pique to the day he becomes King of Isle. Trevyn's homeland is being attacked by hordes of wolves possessed by the followers of Wael, chief priest of the cult of the wolf. Trevyn first encounters them while saving the enigmatic maiden Meg and her cow Molly from a mire. He is unable to vanquish the wolves except temporarily and with Meg's help. After forming an attachment with Meg, Trevyn leaves and sails to the home of Wael, Tokar. Here he is shipwrecked and made a slave. While pretending to be mute, Trevyn is bought by the magician Erist and they become allies in the fight against the wolf cult. A conflict with Wael results in temporary victory but Trevyn has to travel to the magic island of Elwstrand in order to grow in wisdom and strength. Returning to Isle he finally defeats Wael and his followers. As for Meg - Reader, she marries him.

Throughout the book there are references to characters and adventures presumably met in the previous two books. *The Sable Moon* can be read on its own but is really an integral part of the trilogy.

The characters, quite often bearing mythological names, are fairly well-drawn - especially that of Gwern (the dark side or 'Wyrd' of Trevyn) - with a few exceptions. Some are sketchy having been introduced in previous books. The references throughout to fabled animals, like unicorns, and plants, like asphodels, are rather disconcerting. My impression is that the author has crammed in every possible piece of folklore known to her whether it belongs to Greek or Celtic tradition - strange bedfellows! In fact *The Sable Moon* does what most average fantasy does - steals blind from existing traditions and environments thus obviating the need for creation of a new and strange world or civilization.

To sum up - in the current field of fantasy fiction if you want an undemanding read this book may interest you. But read the other two books first.

**GREENSIGHT** - Angela Shackleton-Hill

[George Allen & Unwin, 1984, 371pp, £8.95]

Reviewed by David V. Barrett

'From the eafaon-arol of Huyilf astayl, as translated by Heorad Iarithyr: first thiayl of elth in Gwnael and first reth... "Eaf is Life, it is All. All that ever existed, that will exist and may exist, is eaf. And eaf is creativity, unto creation's effect. Thus, it is perhaps strange to speak of teinith-eaf of the First Life and yefith-eaf the Second, as though there are two eternal, but that is how my father named them in the Lifedoomsong and he was the astayl - the earthwise..." (p.xi)

SO I JOURNEYED FORTH, MY QUEST TO SEEK understanding, my heart burdened by unpronounceable names and unintelligible paragraphs, my companions Arich Astienyr, a poet and salvor, or healer-through-the-mind; a dying herd of waifs, strangely-powered antlered horses; a number of somewhat revolting, hairless, eyeless,

wolf-like creatures; and several comparatively unimportant people.

Twenty thousand years in our future, in a cold northern land with no stars in the sky - the significance of which escaped me completely - Arich attempts to reinterpret the ancient mythologies, and becomes entangled with his own Bonding with the last waif, and his own struggles, oft-times almost to the point of Death, with Evil. That, as I understood it, was the plot.

My pilgrimage was long and hard; I could travel no more than thirty leagues - sorry, pages - a day, trudging through unending mires of impenetrable prose, climbing mountains of agonising self-reflection, until I arrived at the last at my journey's end, and was in no way wiser than at its beginning.

The language is often poetic, and sometimes brave and inventive. I applaud 'he tramped on through the gridelin dusk' (=grey-purple), but could make nothing of 'and stood before the syenite sky' (=rock-like). But mostly it is heavy and slow, and repetitious: every other paragraph, and then every other sentence, could safely have been deleted. And of what use is the eleven-page glossary, where a typical entry reads 'esse: the eafher warded in Ivhain by thiaylim of Errith Earithyr's line'?

I tend to link books with music. While reading one section, I was listening to a particularly demonic fifteen minute live version of Curved Air's 'Ultra-Vivaldi', followed by the Blue Oyster Cult's 'Don't Fear the Reaper': a tortuous reach towards unscalable peaks; a heavy, dark, doom-laden deathwish. The match was exact. There is a beauty in this book, but it is the beauty of flowers lying on an open coffin. The constant drifting between present reality and tortured vision has the nightmare confusion of the *Illuminatus* books, miscegenated with the deep mystery of the Eddas, and written by an immature Dylan Thomas during a bad acid trip.

'Arich picked out the sheets on which he had written...It disturbed him most of all that they were fragments laid down in metre - lines composed at times when he had felt a poetry come on him: a strong but jumbled impression of bloodscent and pouring light, of fire and the bale of hawks, of stars burning like eyes in their brains.' (p.177).

This is an admirable description of the literary style throughout *Greensight*. But amongst all the words, I found no meaning. Having had to wade through it, I would genuinely like to know what it was all about; I doubt that anyone but the author - and perhaps not even she - could enlighten me.

**THE SONG OF MIDDLE EARTH** - David Harvey

[George Allen & Unwin, 1985, 143pp, £10.95]

Reviewed by Chris & Pauline Morgan

THE WORKS OF THAT POPULAR CULT FIGURE J.R.R. Tolkien have been considered as an exercise in linguistics (by Tom Shippey in *The Road to Middle-Earth*) or in Jungian psychology (by T.R. O'Neill in *The Individuated Hobbit*). David Harvey can only explain them as a mythology. Tolkien, it seems, was worried that while Wales, Ireland and most other European countries had a series of creation myths, England had none. Therefore he set out to create one. Unfortunately, mythologies do not come ready-formed; they develop as tales are passed on by oral tradition. They do not necessarily start at the beginning during their evolution. Neither did Tolkien.

He started with *The Hobbit*, a tale

without mythological intent, written for children. Even its sequel, *The Lord of the Rings*, did not develop in the way that he originally intended. Tolkien was a painstaking writer, and a perfectionist, as the scraps of earlier versions published in *Unfinished Tales* and the *Lost Tales* show. It is doubtful if his original intention was to develop a mythology but, as a professor of early English literature, he would no doubt have begun by drawing on material he was familiar with - *Beowulf* and the Eddas. Later he obviously did intend to create a mythos, and *The Silmarillion* was the result.

David Harvey seems to regard the whole of Tolkien's writings as fitting the pattern laid out by the mythologies of other western cultures (it is noticeable that he draws no comparison with Asian or African mythos). Indeed, Harvey has a good case. There are the Tragic Heroes (as Harvey capitalises them) Turin Turambar and Frodo Baggins; compare them with Hamlet, Oedipus and Gawain. Tolkien also has his Quest Heroes, Beren, Aragorn and Earendil, to be considered alongside Galahad. And in the beginning there is the creation, the way things came to be, how the sun and the moon took their appointed places and how evil entered the world and paradise was forbidden to sinful man. These are common themes present in Tolkien and in virtually all cultures of the world.

Perhaps this is where so many fantasy writers before and since Tolkien have gone wrong. Perhaps to catch the imagination in the way that Tolkien did it may be necessary to include these themes, whether consciously or unconsciously, in any epic tale.

When considering these factors perhaps their importance should be questioned. Clearly, to David Harvey they are very important and, to be fair, he has made his piece of academia very readable. Undoubtedly there will be scholars of English literature who will find his ideas interesting, or that kind of enthusiast who must see motives behind every word, and allegories on every page. But for those of us who just wish to read Tolkien for enjoyment this little volume is best left on the shelf.

**GILGAMESH THE KING** - Robert Silverberg

[Gollancz, 1985, 320pp, £9.95]

Reviewed by Sue Thomson

ALTHOUGH WRITTEN BY A FAMOUS SF-AUTHOR, AND issued by a Famous SF-Publisher, this book is not SF, nor is it intended to be read as fantasy, but as historical reconstruction, an account of the 'historical Gilgamesh' which is factually correct as far as possible, and filled out with imagination where the records are missing. As Silverberg has a serious interest in history and archaeology, I am sure that he has taken pains to get his portrait of Sumerian life right. All the verifiable details of dress, architecture, burial customs; I am sure they can all be substantiated from archaeological excavation and contemporary records.

So why does the book leave me so cold?

I can't help comparing a work of this nature with the first, and so far the best, example of its kind I've read: Mary Renault's *The King Must Die* about the 'historical' Theseus. And the thing I first notice is the difference in character between Theseus and Gilgamesh. Theseus is a representative of a complex and utterly alien cultural mind-set. He has strengths and weaknesses, beliefs, ideals, thoughts (many of them). By the end of the book I feel I know him, fascinatingly strange



though he is, rather well.

Gilgamesh, on the other hand, is definitely *not* the sort of person I want to get to know better. He's of heroic physique, and takes no time at all in letting us know this. He's the best fighter, he screws the most women, works the hardest, doesn't understand Women or Intrigue; he's a brainless bully who's



ROBERT SILVERBERG

convinced of his own superiority, a standard-issue All-American Barbarian (they probably already have Arnie S. lined up for the film...). Though he tries quite hard to work up a Death Complex, he's your archetypal uncomplicated extrovert, ready to solve his country's problems before lunch, followed by a couple of hours of good clean chariot-fighting and a woman or five to relax with in the evenings.

Yech.

Yech. Yech. Yech. Though I suppose there are still boys who like this kind of thing; a sanitised, demythologised, plastic film-set of a culture, complete with Berk/Hero, one; Bitch-Goddess, one; Supporting Good Guy Who Snuffs It, one; Supporting Good Girl Who Snuffs It, one... It's enough to make one give up historical novels, almost. What can I say that's nice about this book?

The cover art is excellent.

**THE WARRIOR WHO CARRIED LIFE** - Geoff Ryman  
[George Allen and Unwin, 1985, 173pp, £8.95 (hardback) £2.95 (paperback)]  
Reviewed by Mike Dickinson

It's a curious fact that, whereas fantasy remains generally the field of mediocrity, it has featured some work superior in ambition and execution to almost anything produced in either genres or mainstream. Even on shelves currently littered with asinine Anthony's, dreary Donaldsons and morbid Moorcocks it is possible to find writers who can entertain and excite both in what they say, and the way they say it.

Now, declaring himself a writer to be taken as seriously as the best, comes Geoff Ryman. Those already familiar with the Interzone story 'The Unconquered Country', will not be surprised. That story convinced in its depiction of the personal and cultural trauma caused by Western blundering. It used fantasy purposefully to empathise with a culture that is as alien to us as any of those Hal Clement things,

and to express its sickened outrage. It seemed to many then that here was a powerful and individual voice whose time had come to be hard.

This first novel confirms that impression.

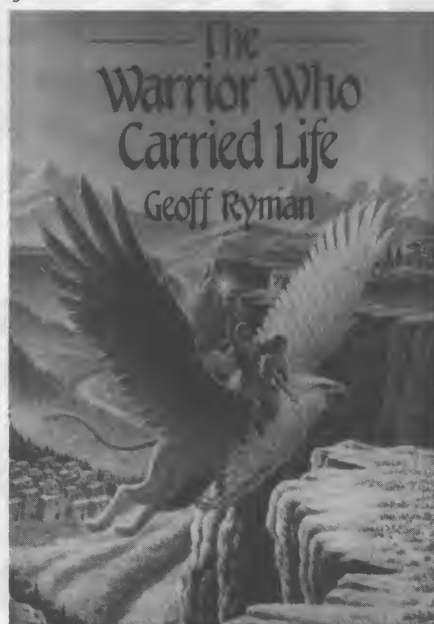
The vast majority of the book concerns a year in the life of a young woman, Cara. While still a child she has seen her mother destroyed; a seer who broke taboos and told men things they did not want to hear. Later her noble family was shattered and she herself mutilated for resisting the will of a powerful new ruling house. On attaining adulthood, Cara is inducted into Kasova magic, a decadent remnant of the potent earlier Wensenara group of sorceresses. Having learnt the spells for starting fires and sitting on air, she is taught the one which will allow her to change form for a year, to mature her magic. The usual choice is something savage like a wolf; she chooses a form even more dangerous, that of a mature armed warrior, and thus begins a year dedicated to revenge.

All of this has occupied only the first sixteen pages of the book. Yet in that time we have already had her mother eaten by dogs; a horrifically detailed description of the storming by the inhuman, in all senses, Galu of her native village; and, perhaps more important, the psychological effects of her growing up with the remnants of her family and the remnant of herself. It is this fusion of terrific plotting, incident crowding remorselessly upon incident, with psychological values that demonstrates the hand of a master writer. No extraneous information is provided, so the reader is pushed on by action until the moment such information has maximum impact. And characterisation is done deftly in little jigsaw pieces: "Sister", she called Latch and tried to smile, the aperture of her mouth widening only slightly over skull-like teeth. Even Latch shuddered and looked away. Cara's face had become a weapon. (p.13) Thus Cara deals with a former bondswoman of her family, now content to exploit their fall.

The background of the novel is anomalous: a ziggurat seal suggests the Hittite civilisation; whereas the presence of books in many languages, old enough to be considered passe, indicates millennia later. It does emerge though that there is a clear causal connection with the Epic of Gilgamesh, the first known heroic poem, surviving partially from the third millennium BC. There are several clear reasons for avoiding the label 'based on'. Principally, despite several exceptions such as the adult work of Henry Treece, Robert Nye's *Merlin*, *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter, and Robert Holdstock's excellent *Mythago Wood*, most of those reworkings of ancient myth are parasitical, detracting from, rather than enhancing, the magic of the original story. Secondly, this link is rather more tenuous, being closer to 'inspired by' rather than any direct modelling. Certainly there are some similar features: for example, both Cara and Gilgamesh traverse great mountains; both visit the Underworld; both have to contend with god-like figures, and most explicitly, both go in search of the key to immortality. However, in some measure *The Warrior Who Carried Life* is an antithesis to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Gilgamesh is a despoiler of virgins and a lover of battle; in short, the sort of arrogant brutish male sometimes called Conan or Thongor, or a host of other such names in relatively contemporary work. His companion is Enkidu, another similar Husky. In contrast, Ryman's hero/heroine is accompanied by a slight girl, Stefile. She

ironically saves Cara's life on at least one occasion, as she/he turns out, at least at first, to be no invincible warrior. In fact, one of the subtexts is an exploration of male/female roles within imaginative fiction. One of the few humorous sections is Cara's surprise at the male body and fascination at managing its external genitalia.



However, imagination is the keynote of the book as Ryman hits the reader with continuing wonders, including the visit to the Land of the Dead, where Cara encounters the archetypal Adam and Eve (forget the sanitised Old Testament version, this feels much more like the real thing!); the mountain retreat of the original, still-powerful Wensenara, and a journey with Asu Kweetar, the huge 'Beast Who talks to God'. Then there are other marvels, such as the strange nature of the Galu and the wonderful specialisations of the warrior clans, especially the deadliest of them all, the 'Men who look like Angels', whom Cara joins. Finally, there is a climax of truly stunning proportions. To state it briefly, this is really creative mythologising.

The original inspiration of this novel is more evident in mood and style. Both works are dominated by death. The earlier work changes with the hero's intimidation by his own mortality, having seen Enkidu die; the latter, reflecting less self-centred ends, deals with the potential slaughter of the whole population of Earth and the actual death of a fair proportion. Nevertheless, it is in style that Ryman is most spiritually in tune with the original - incident dominated with a sustained narrative drive, featuring a dispassionate chronicling of horrific details (some of these are more truly horrible than any found in the horror genre) - a thoroughly macabre streak.

For those who know only 'The Unconquered Country', this change of style must come as a great surprise, contrasting with the hypersensitive cerebral personal and dreamlike quality of that shorter work. At a time when too many writers of any type seem insensitive to mood and only capable of one stock style, the flexibility of Ryman shows a genuine blend of craftsman and artist - adventure on a magnificently heroic scale, accomplished with economy.

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